

# CLOSE UP

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## AS IS

BY THE EDITOR

Those who have mentioned *Blackmail* in *Close Up* have left much to say about it. We are not burning to make a written orderliness of its implications, but we are interested to do so, because it is a film of essentially an examinable nature, and of a nature that, once examined, is far and away the most significant determinant to unification of sound-sight deliberately and sustainedly that we have yet had. *Blackmail*, I want to establish, is the first sign of a comprehension of the relationship of techniques. I have seen most of the talking films. Without exception any power they may have had to hold us was fragmentary, accidental—purely and wholly accidental. Bouldery jumble without inter-relation or any specific plan, without architecture and without mortar, the object of which must be considered to be served if it can get its story told.

Long before the word montage was ever heard, a film had served its purpose if it adequately illustrated its sub-titles.

In those days it might have been likened to magazine illustrations. "Overcome" said the subtitle "with remorse, Felicitas determines to be revenged upon her betrayer, and that night . . . ." In those days Felicitas would then have been shown on the usual tinted stock creeping exhibitionistically to the assassination. Mr. Hitchcock, supposing that such a title were possible in these days, with a more modern technique would show a curtain billowing, fingers running mediumistically down the handle of a knife, then cut to Big Ben, and help his montage with a scream.

There now, wait here.

Montage. Mr. Hitchcock is quite the first to have realised and profited by the fact that the talkies we all go to see are using a crassly naïve and retrospective manner which differs from the cinema's genesis only in that spoken dialogue now illustrates the picture-text instead of pictures illustrating written text. I think Mr. Hitchcock began to see, and is probably working it out in his mind now, and will use it well in his next film, that sound is not an accessory to lollop clumsily beside a film leashed in a twin harness, but a direct spur and aid to simplification, to economy. Accoustical montage, in short. Take this instance from *Blackmail*, it is a good one. I said Mr. Hitchcock would help his montage with a scream, which, in fact he did do. You remember Anny Ondra after the murder pacing the streets. You remember her obsession with the flung back, trailing hand of the murdered artist. At the end of her trudging, when she must have been, incidentally, very exhausted, the sight of a sleeping beggar with outflung, trailing hand, brings forth a scream. There is an immediate cut to the screaming face



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of the old woman who finds the artist's murdered body. This is neat and dramatic. It is important, because it is the exact use of sound in its right relation. Part of the building. It is suave and polished, but more important than any of these, it is intensely significant. I say it is part of building, and until sound and film are built in one, grafted, and growing together, not much is going to be done. The scream that was both the girl's scream and the concierge's scream banished a lot that we can well do without. Picture this silent. You could not very well leave Anny Ondra screaming there. The beggar would or would not wake. She would hurry on. This would probably have to be shown. At the point of her hurrying on there could be a cut to the bed curtain being pulled back and then the old woman's face screaming. That is to say, that at least there would have had to be three additional un-dramatic shots needful to continuity, but causing a sagging of dramatic moment. Three at least. When you think of films you see, it is possible the script would have called for the old lady knocking, entering, pulling up the blind, going over to the bed, and so forth. Two shots and one sound did all this a hundred times better. There were the three shocks in sheer dramatic unity (in its Potamkin sense) piled in one. The effect could not but have been, as it was, ideal.

The far more obvious, though quaintly touching, bird song accompanying, in the best Pudovkin manner, contrapuntally the dazed, and in the circumstances, excusably meagre toilet of the heroine, should have its mention, as should, for just the same reason, the artist's words, "I live right up there at the top" (or words to that effect) at which

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we look, as we would, not at his lips, but where he is directing our attention, namely up the stairs toward the top.

Here, by the way, although I did not like the *Seventh Heaven* mounting of the stairs, Hitchcock built very deftly his atmosphere of chilly squalor. The intentions of each and their knowledge of the implications had a power that reminded me of Pabst at his best but in slower tempo. The way in which slight contacts gave out under pressure of everything that makes contacts give out when you go to a new place for the first time, the augmenting distrust, were dwelt on carefully, with conscious, sustained slowness. The murder I did not like, but this is not relevant to the point I am making, that *Blackmail* appears to me to deserve our most serious attention, not as a story, not necessarily for its recording, which, by the way, a British Phototone product, was excellent, and very free from the bangs, roars and reverberations that sooner or later we shall have to accustom ourselves to if we can. *Blackmail* deserves our attention, as I have already said, because it has a conscious effort to bring technical thoughtfulness to bear on its own construction. The instance I have used of the scream I do suggest should be thought over as a clue. We just do not want sound as an accompaniment, and, if I may say so, neither do we want it solely as a counterpoint. We want it as part of the film, spliced on to it and inseparable. Not to slow the film, but to speed it. Let me proffer another hint from the Knife, knife, knife scene. "Aren't you feeling yourself?" Anny Ondra's father asks her. A small screaming clang begins, which gets louder and louder, and bursts like a shell. Meanwhile you are watching Anny Ondra's face, very drawn,



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half stupified. Her father says "another customer". The clang-scream was the shop bell. Phobia has translated it thus to her, meaning psycho-analytically that through that door may come the police. The door bell has become unconsciously a thing of terror. This again is worth thinking of. You might call it cinematic sound. It is not sound only, it gives you a picture of a mental state, as well as having its rightful place in the narrative.

Both these instances are given as indicative of the way we must begin to think of sound if we are to do anything with it. I was touched and amazed to find it thus in a British film, far and away the best talkie we have seen. I had meant this to be an article of sound with *Blackmail* as something to evolve something else out of. Since I have considered it more objectively than that, let me add a word of praise for Joan Barry's ghosting for Miss Ondra's voice. The overlayer of "refainment" on Cockney was superb. Donald Calthrop's more traditionally elocutional manner became good if you decided soon enough that there was a down-and-out actor, though no indication was given of the fact. The story condensed to a study in fear was excellent. If you preferred its more obvious, objective presentation it was a weak story, full of old clichés. After all, the heightened conduct and heightened impasse conventionally demanded of drama are not limitless, and to-day's innovation becomes to-morrow's cliché, and the day after to-morrow's joke. The story, however, (and it's after all the crux of every argument on story value) was not beneath psychology. Everything was accountable, and it dealt largely with minds. The established statement that it's not the story but the way you

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handle it that matters can be accountable only after you have established several other conditions. The psychology possibility is one of the most important of them.

People have not yet begun to speak, far less to think, of sound in the same way as they think now and write in *Close Up* and elsewhere of vision. They must. The theory of sound and sound-vision is just as complicated, and in many ways similar. Sound must never be thought of alone. It must now be inseparably and forever sound-sight. The construction of sound-sight aesthetic must be taken in hand. An illusory amplification of reality is not achieved by adding odd effects haphazardly whether they be a third dimension, clairvoyance or every sound that the world contains. The silent film at its best has already shown that unquestioning credence can be tapped. In other words, any medium that can take you where it wants to and make you credulous is complete. If you are taken there is no further demand that can possibly be made of you. The film silent or forever sounding can be complete or not in the exact degree in which it is able to render you a participant, non-existent, obliterated and believing. If sound jangles you into self-consciousness, into any awareness, it is sound wrongly used, and the film would be better without it. Consider, after all, sound. Very few of the million noises surrounding us every second of our lives are received in the portentous, acutely self-aware manner in which they are thrust upon us in the cinemas. Sound of motor cars, for example, react differently on different nervous systems. Here Hitchcock's method of the bell clang-scream is significant. Sound is more like this. And sound is not one isolated, reedy noise filling a whole



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auditorium. It can only be rendered symbolically always. The million sounds you hear have a special timbre, rhythm, sound-sight significance. What a complicated, vast, never-ending science the investigation and psychology of sound is going to present to us, and some of us already are beginning to say that talkies are an art. When you think, nobody has translated sound, except into music. It has remained an unclassified, unqualified, imminent and unresolvable substance over and around us, without symbolic form; without, let us say, the fierce lines of sculptured metal that somebody might submit as a shape for it—without any art form. And before we can use it as trimming or sewing thread even, we must set it an area, find terms for it and text books, know what sound is and what it does and what we do with it. And that will need a science more than medical, therapeutical, psycho-analytical, mechanical or philosophic. Till then, gee, honey, ah'm jes *crazy* 'bout yu, and I don't mind telling the world I miss the sound now in a silent film, and *you'll be with me.*

KENNETH MACPHERSON.

## THE INDEPENDENT CINEMA IN BELGIUM

It seems a little strange that Belgium should not by this time have developed a local film industry and her own school of cinematography on a considerable scale. All the necessary elements are to hand: method and the capacity for teamwork so essential to cinematographic enterprise, intrepidity in business undertakings and, what is even more important, those particular characteristics, to be observed in the work of Feyder of Brussels, which give her artists a peculiar sensibility to rhythm and to the plastic in people and things. But historic circumstances we need not here specify in detail have decided against her and Belgium, where the film industry is conspicuously prosperous, is still dependent upon the outside world for the filling of her screens.

And, since she has no organised film production, she has no studios fitted with first-class appliances, no nucleus of experienced actors and interpreters. Therefore, the independent artists who keep going in spite of everything, carry on their work in the face of the gravest difficulties and the vanguard of clubs and cinemas are able to show their films only by dint of constant appeals to foreign companies and producers and are often defeated by the demands of one or other of these.



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I propose in this article to deal with two aspects of the independent cinema in Belgium: production, and the activities of the specialised cinemas.

First, as to production. Incontestably the leader of the Belgian school is Charles Dekeukeleire. He is a native of Brussels, of Flemish descent and about twenty-five years of age. His artistic education has been achieved haphazard and he is, as I have often remarked, a lover of plastic form and particularly of music. His love of music should be underlined, for it helps us to understand a certain exaggeration in his manner.

His first essay was made in 1927: *Combat de Boxe*. It is difficult to give a just idea of the scenario of this film. Each detail is important and significant, each image has its own proper value and its value in the lyrical continuity of the whole: which is a series of rhythmical impressions, alternately objective and subjective. Two themes: primarily the prize-fight in itself, with its successive phases and its final ferocity, incidentally the reactions of the crowd, attentive, agitated and at last tumultuous.

It is in the subordination of one theme to another that we must look for justification for the use of crowd-images and the close ups of the referee in negative. This is a particle of cinematographic syntax that so far has been very little employed even by the most adventurous and that certainly conveys a highly complex impression whose full significance is to be grasped only by a subtle process of reasoning for which the generality of spectators have neither inclination nor ability.

The distinctive quality of Dekeukeleire's work is the

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rhythm informing it from first to last. This, as we know, has been intelligently, patiently and laboriously worked out. The result is most striking and we must admit that never, save perhaps by the conclusion of Pudovkin's *Storm Over Asia*, have we been more impressed by the importance of the part to be played by rhythm than in the showing of *Combat de Boxe*. This rhythm, particularly towards the end of the film at the moment when the two boxers are exchanging the blows which will leave one victorious and the other lying prone and vanquished upon the floor of the ring—blows whose swift images force us to be aware of their gradual relaxation—is so significantly and lyrically constructed that it creates an indefinable anguish, to be dissipated only at the moment of the appearance upon the screen of a black fist, the fist of the conqueror, in a final gesture, and the crowd—now the principal theme and suddenly appearing in positive—acclaims the victory.

This film has been shown in Paris, at the *Ursulines*, in Germany and in Belgium, with a certain measure of success.

After a fruitless effort to produce, in collaboration with the *Vlamchs-Volks Tooniel*, an adaptation of a Flemish legend, *L'enfant Jésus en Flandre*, Dekeukeleire a few weeks ago completed *Impatience*. It is a species of cinegraphic poem and again is primarily an essay in visual rhythm. Here, as in the *Combat de Boxe*, there is a leading theme, whose "exponents" are a road, a motor-car, moving shapes and a woman. To the central theme, the course of the car, the secondary themes, the surrounding landscape and the reactions expressed by the face and hands of the woman, add little by little their rhythm accelerated by impatience



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until it reaches a sort of frenzy justified only by its visual value: thus is achieved the triumph of the abstract, and a fourth theme is introduced by means of the evolution of the geometric forms which lead the film to the culmination of its "orchestration".

The work, taking forty minutes to project, is rather long. It is unequal too, and is an example of what a Belgian critic of high standing, Mr. Paul Werrie, has called "the musical mishaps of the cinema". Dekeukeleire is too exclusively pre-occupied with the visual music of images and leaves their composition to a too summary inspiration. The result is a destructive lack of equilibrium between his values. Nevertheless, this second effort of his amply justifies the interest he has aroused. This young experimenter has given the sense of speed a fresh expression. To explain my meaning: when a producer sets out to cinematise speed he has so far, more or less ably, with a greater or less degree of talent, established a relationship between movement and immobility, between for example a car and the road over which it moves, or has shown us some part of the car that directly expresses speed, say the wheels, Dekeukeleire disdains all such methods. He imposes the sensation of speed solely by the trepidation of cylinders or of the indicator. His end is attained with force and precision that cannot be imagined by one who has not been subjected to the suggestion. Exactly in the originality of his expression of speed by a motionless object do we sound the incidental possibilities of the personality of Dekeukeleire the seeker.

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In sharp contrast to the producer of *Impatience* is Gussy

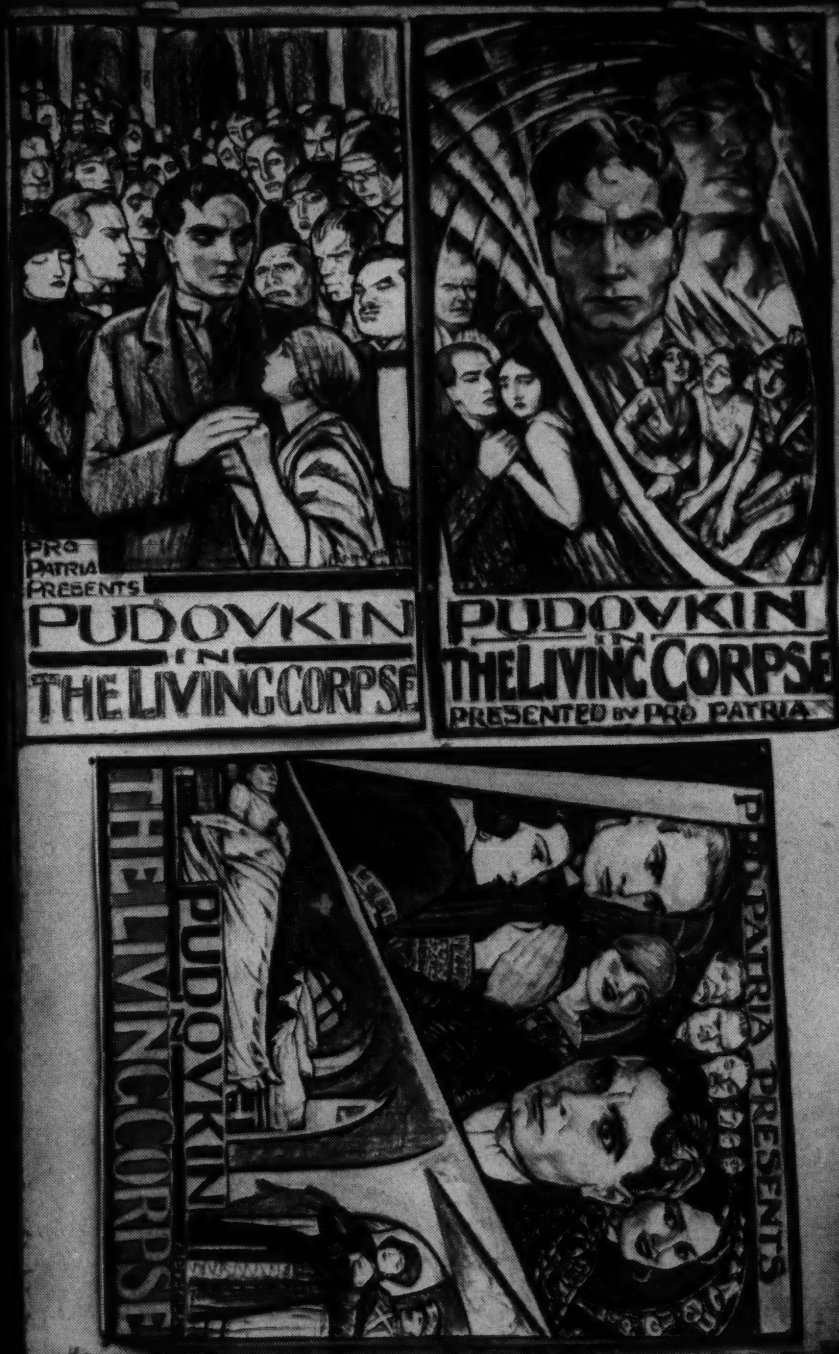
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Lauwson whose talent is much less vigorous and who takes but little account of rhythm. He, like Dekeukeleire, had no opportunity before risking the production of his first effort, of learning how to overcome the difficulties of handling his material with the help of a first-class scenarist. His first film, *Reflets*, is nevertheless interesting. It is dominated by a single idea, *Life is nothing but illusion, a dream, death alone is real*, developed thus:

"From infancy onwards, man follows a chimera of one sort or another if only that which is produced by the desire for greatness. Then comes maturity. The early illusion vanishes giving place to another which in its turn disappears and makes way for its successor. Illusions vary according to age, circumstance character and will. For the weaker sort there is nothing for it but to create an illusion, unfounded moreover, by annihilating both senses and will. Others seek illusion in the imaginative fantasies of cartomancers and fortune-tellers. For all of us illusion may be generalised as representing the desire for happiness sought by everyone according to his particular moral predisposition: love, wealth, work, oblivion, travel. Illusion is a see-saw that comes and goes, a whirling roundabout, a pendulum swinging too and fro, a light that gleams, grows, prevails and disappears, a poem, a romance; in reality a lie to be revealed only by the inevitable presence of death."

Thus, as I have already noted, while it is rhythmic construction that triumphs in the case of Dekeukeleire, for the producer of *Reflets* and a young scenarist Carlo Queeckers who has just given us *Kermesse Flamande* and is now at Antwerp finishing *l'Emigrant*, the principal considerations

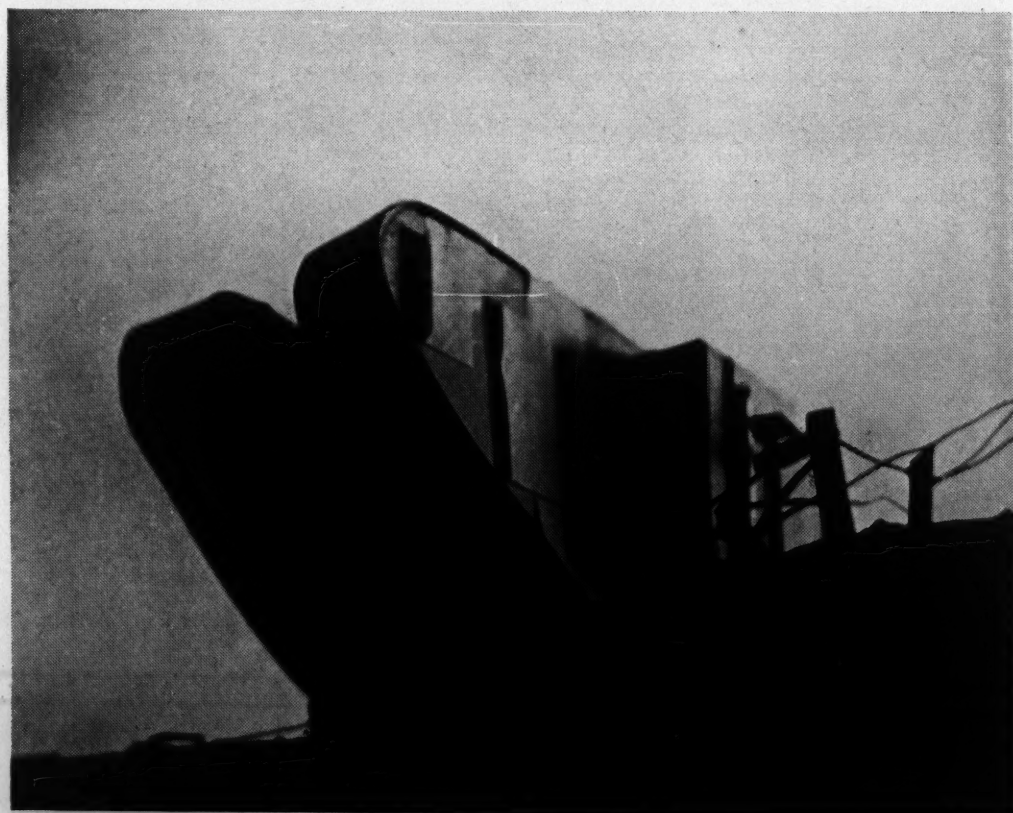




Some of the very lovely Laphorn posters designed for the *Living Corpse*, and recently on view at the Avenue Pavilion.



A British amateur film of distinction. See Comment and Review. *The Gaiety of Nations*, produced by J. H. Ahern and G. H. Sewell of the London A.C.A. Cardboard models were largely employed.







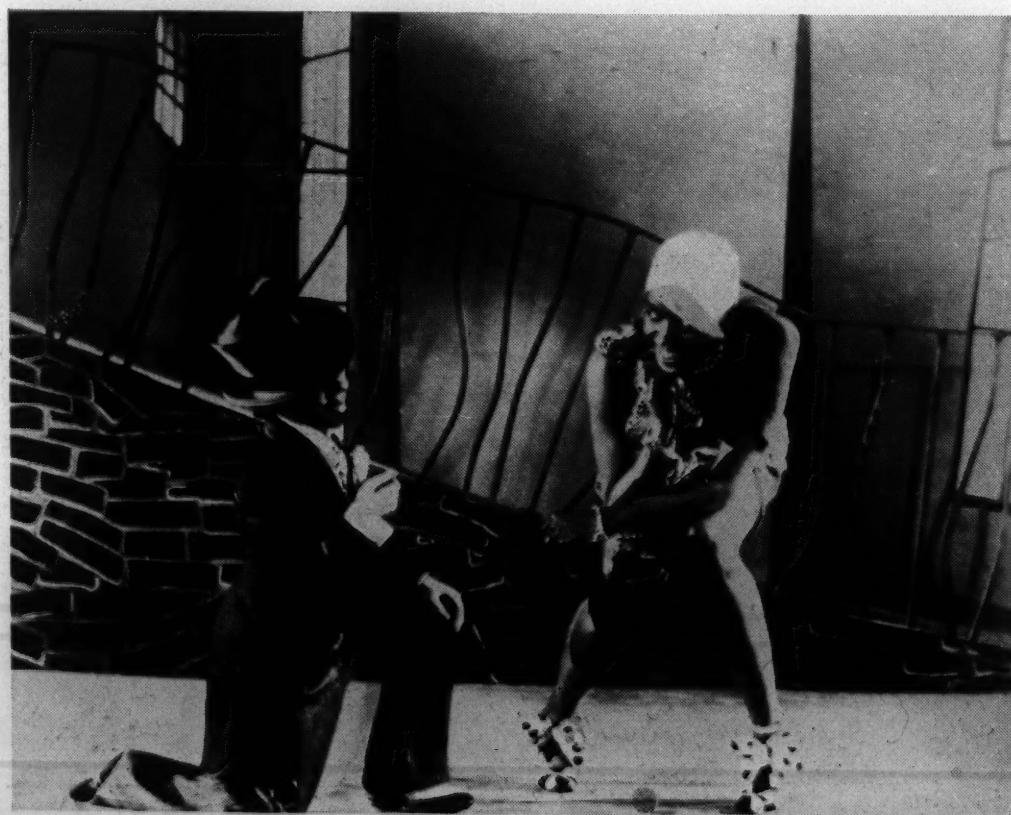
Mary Pickford and Douglas Fairbanks in their latest joint venture, *The Taming of the Shrew*,—a talkie. We are a little dismayed at the costume details, but you know what films are . . .



Photos: K. O. Rahmn



From *The Movietone Follies*—Fox's. Part of the sequence during the singing of *Walkin' With Susie*.







28-60

*Blackmail*, Alfred Hitchcock's latest film. John Longden (left) as the detective, Annie Ondra and Donald Calthorp.



28-115

The murder in *Blackmail*.



*Kayn and Artem*, based on a novel by Maxim Gorki.  
Director : Petroff-Bitoff. Artiste : E. Egorova.



*Old and New (The General Line)* which Eisenstein took  
recently to Berlin. Martha Lapkina, the star.





*Old and New.* The bull Tomke, one of the heroes of the film.



*Old and New (The General Line)* by Eisenstein and Alexandroff. The peasant's spring.



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are composition and originality of image. Gussy Lauwson appears to ignore cadence in the succession of his scenes. And even though in a part of his work our attention is attracted by what appears to be an animating movement, in reality this movement is not the result of deliberate handling but is incidental to the given material: the sea, the roundabout. On the other hand his treatment of light and shadow and his choice of the angle of vision are always remarkable and there are scenes in *Reflets* such as that of the young woman at her toilet and the waves beating upon the dunes, whose relief and tonality are really astonishing. For these we may forgive Gussy Lauwson certain scenes in which he indulges in the worst kind of symbolism in the manner of Gance. It is interesting to note that the first two producers to appear in Belgium are sharply contrasted both in character and personality and in their views on the art of the cinema.

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Let us glance at the activities of the independent cinema. The first serious attempt in the direction of establishing a centre for the reproduction of classics and the showing of works by young producers who are also innovators dates from 1926. This successful effort was inaugurated by my friend Albert Valentin, the eminent critic and one of those who knows the most about the Belgian cinema. For a year he held the directorship of the Cinema Club which then passed into my hands. It is a heavy task. So far I have acquitted myself with an unfailing enthusiasm that will not, I hope, be vanquished by fresh difficulties. Since last year the Club has been housed in a small hall, accommodating about three hundred, in the grandiose *Palais des Beaux Arts*,

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built by the architect Horta in the centre of Brussels. The setting is modern and is incontestably the most beautiful in Europe at the disposal of the independent cinema. Those who are able to compare it with the French halls, the *Vieux Colombier*, the *Ursulines* and *Studio 28* have expressed to me their surprise and their admiration. During the latter part of last winter the evening programmes presented at this hall were all drawn up in accordance with the ideas of the Cinema Club. And this propaganda on behalf of good films will not have failed to bear fruit. The most conclusive testimony I can give as to the recent work of the Brussels Cinema Club, whose example has been followed by the Ostend Cinema Club numbering last year well over six hundred members, is to enumerate from the lists drawn up at the time of performance some of the films shown during a single season. My selection is made at random: *Charlot à la Mer*, *Rien que les Heures*, by Cavalcanti; *Théâtre*, by Dupont; *Puzzle*, by Paul Lénì; *L'Exode*, by Cooper and Schoedsack; *Fièvre* by Louis Delluc; *Way Down East*, by D. W. Griffith; *La Puissance des Ténèbres*, by Wiene; *Les Grenouilles demandent un Roi*, by Tsarevitch; *La Flamme*, by Ernest Lubitsch; *Moana*, by Flaherty; *La Coquille et le Clergyman*, by Germaine Dulac; *Maître Samuel*, by Sjöstrom; *L'Opinion Publique*, by Charles Chaplin; *Crainquebille*, by Feyder; *Raskolnikoff*, by Wiene; *Les Gens du Warmland*, by Stomberg; *Les Déshérités*, by Lamprecht; *Premier Amour*, by Joseph de Grasse; *Le Cercle du Mariage*, by E. Lubitsch; *Classe Paresseuse*, by Chaplin; *Hollywood*, by James Cruze; *Le Chat et le Canard*, by Paul Lénì; *Le Combat de Boxe*, by Charles Dekeukeleire; *Les*



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*Trois Lumières*, by Fritz Lang; *Le Signe de Zorro*, by Fred Niblo; *Eldorado*, by Marcel l'Herbier; *Lichtspiel*, by Walter Ruttmann; *Jazz*, by James Cruze; *La Quatrième Alliance de Dame Marguerite*, by John Brunius; *Histoire de Chiens*, by E. Woods; *Au Royaume des Glaciers*, by J. Robertson; *La Ruée vers l'Or*, by Chaplin; *Le Fantôme du Moulin Rouge*, by René Clair; *Toison d'Or*, by J. K. Howard; *Emak Bakia*, by Man Ray; *Nathan le Sage*, by Manfred Noa; *Nanook l'Esquimau*, by Flaherty; *l'Inhumaine* by Marcel l'Herbier; and *Le Diable dans la Ville*, by Germaine Dulac. There were also included a number of pre-war films, amongst them a fantasy by G. Melies. This comprehensive programme is a happy blend of films that have already become classics and those that are the work of the advance guard. We were hoping to follow the same plan in the coming winter, when the appearance of the sound and speech film obliged us to postpone the drawing up of our programme for the season now at hand. What is to be our ultimate attitude towards the revolution brought about by the *Chanteur de Jazz*? Doubtless we shall contrive to do for the sound film and the speech film what so far we have been doing for its silent forerunner. But we are assailed by severe technical and financial difficulties. We must hope that the congress of the independent cinema at La Sarraz will have helped to solve them.

CARL VINCENT.

## "GOING TALKIE"

I see that another cinema in Birmingham has just "gone talkie", and that one of the big circuits has ordered no less than forty-five sets of talkie apparatus. Production of sound mechanism has been so "speeded up", according to one of the experts, that by 1930 it will be possible to have ten thousand theatres electrically westernised. In Chelsea, the centre of our sinful cinema, we are not quite so advanced. Sound and silence are having a fight, for a flag has been waving outside one cinema with the words "The Talkies are Coming" inscribed upon it. But outside the other cinema are the words: "Silence is Golden", so that the populace (at the time of writing) is still "in a state of chassis".

To my mind, "going talkie" is so disagreeable a business that it is a marvel how people can be so blithe about it. The phrase "gone talkie" is itself offensive. It suggests, most aptly, a plague. "I met Jones just now. He's gone talkie, poor chap." No; only a mild attack. But you never know how these things will develop."

You don't. The hypnotism of the thing is overwhelming, and it is getting more potent every day. Even the original *Singing Fool*, packed with Warner brotherliness, reduced the 4,000 first nighters at the Brixton Astoria a few weeks



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ago to tears. By now, practically the whole of Brixton must have "gone talkie". The willingness of Brixton, of Hammersmith, of Croydon, of London, Greater London, Middlesex, England, Europe and the world, to be seduced from its former loyalties is shocking. But not surprising; for to be uprooted so violently is to be dramatically entertained.

And I perceive now that I have contracted symptoms of the same disease, though I am hoping to throw it off, for in nearly every talkie there are hints of what might be done if the film producers had a definite talkie sense, which is no more to be acquired in a few weeks than road sense, flying sense, or a sense of words. The view that the talkies are here, whatever happens, so what is the use of objecting to them, may be logical enough, but it can also be applied to wars, scarlet fever and mosquitoes. This is a strictly trade or professional view, and if I had a cinema of my own, no doubt I should employ the same argument. I would embrace the officials of the great film companies and worship the sound they fed on.

But unfortunately I do not own a cinema and there is no reason why I should go talkie in a hurry, especially with the large number of excellent silent films mentioned in the pages of *Close Up* every month. The exhibitor mind repeatedly exemplifies on a grand scale the "state of chassis" into which Chelsea has fallen. It produces a sort of mob law. If I "go talkie" it will be first, because, under the stress of this jurisdiction, there is no other place to go to, and secondly, because a time is evidently approaching (animated by a fear that public opinion will

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change) when the exhibitor will as calmly accept a reduction of the sound element in his films as he accepted speech, sound and song in the first instance. And the fact is, that if one has any respect for sound, it is utterly impossible to go talkie at once—to pack up all one's views of silence and hurl them into oblivion. And the more deliberately, discriminatingly and critically one arrives at an acceptance of the new position, the more firmly will one be rooted there at the last, with infinitely more conviction and pleasure.

This talk about the gramophone having reached perfection and offering a parallel hope for the cinema is enough to drive a sane man mad. Have you ever heard a gramophone which could reproduce, for example, Brahms's First Symphony to perfection? Of course not. It is admirably recorded, but if you are a real lover of music you go and hear Brahms at the Queen's Hall, returning afterwards for a colourable imitation on your own gramophone. You are, as they say, "educated" by the gramophone, but you are inspired by the orchestra, by Brahms himself; and whereas the results of popular education of this kind are disputable, you cannot quarrel with a man's inspiration, even if he is inspired to commit murder like Raskolnikov, or at the other end of the scale to paint "The Philosopher", like Rembrandt.

I am told by experts that in the course of time artistic perfection in sound as applied to motion pictures will be achieved, and that we shall have film music and voices and orchestras in films which are undistinguishable from their originals. On that day I will be willingly received into the new talkie faith, (without renunciation of my "silent"



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beliefs) and indeed, a stage in this initiation was reached when I heard Miss Fay Compton in *Fashions in Love*. Her voice was charmingly that of a human being. We had passages of dialogue from Mr. Menjou which almost made us believe that Mr. Menjou was three dimensional; and when he put on his coat we heard the little swirl of noise as his arms went into the sleeves. It was an extraordinary pleasure. In *Wanted*, I remember, there was a further sequence of audible excitements. The voices of the girls being chased in the snow by Bill Boyd and the detectives were astonishingly realistic. They had the effect of planting us right into the middle of the action and making us feel, when the accident happened, that we might be drawn irresistibly by a shout into hauling somebody out of the ice. Voices heard "off" like this are always more effective than those which we can follow from the mouth of the speaker, because there is nothing to interfere with the free play of one's imagination. However natural it may be, however dramatic or appealing, the sound from the screen constantly challenges one's experience of the thing heard. Comparisons rise up like solid reference points to which the ear can at once apply its tests, and no doubt much of the pleasure found in the talkies is due to this universal faculty by which the least intelligent spectator becomes an experienced critic of his own entertainment. But in proportion as we are delighted when a song, an exclamation or a noise, truly announces itself—in pitch and delivery the perfect echo of the original—as much are we offended when it falls short of perfection. For example, the imitation of trains clanking and hissing into railway stations, does not seem to me to

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represent the grandeur and fuss with which trains do, in fact, arrive, and having a great liking for trains and a respect for their movement, their magnificence, and their noise, I resent the want of realism in their sound portraiture. Nor have I heard a door slam or effectively knocked for an answer, whereas doors and their long faces, the way in which so much of life is hinged upon them, require to be given full value, vocal and pictorial, for their part in the drama of everyday life. I cannot "go talkie" before a front door which closes like a piece of cardboard, and gives me no sense of the castle it defends. No can I be moved, except to laughter, by the sobs of a heroine who sounds as though she has been ducked at Margate by a playful holiday-maker determined to be manly and jolly. One could infinitely expand the list of sounds, human and abstract, which fail to reproduce themselves faithfully at points along the film route. The interest they create is one of simple, gaping curiosity, in which the audience wonders whether Mr. Douglas Fairbanks' laugh in sound terms will resemble the roar of Mr. Fairbanks himself. The snoring of the negro in Al Jolson's dressing-room in *The Singing Fool* was clearly designed to demonstrate that a mechanically perfect snore was not beyond the resources of Hollywood. The incident in itself was entirely unrelated to the rest of the action. Are we to be snored, ducked, hooted (as in *The Cocoanuts*) mooed, growled and sneezed into talkie acceptance? Not unless these sounds are an indispensable element in the dramatic fabric, and so far this claim has not been justified. In no case, except possibly in *Blackmail*, has sound been economised so as to intensify or proportion out its force, and



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in most of the films I have seen the sound has been poured into the action until it is bursting with rash eloquence (*Desert Song, Broadway Melody, etc.*) And what sound! Who can hear these songs and savage hoots without squirming? Well, I cannot, and I do not try, except as a professional duty. I enjoy Adolphe Menjou, Carol Lombard, George Bancroft, Donald Calthrop, Cyril Ritchard, Jameson Thomas, Fay Compton and a few others. I enjoy the sound of sea-gulls at St. Ives, of running water, wood-chopping, violins, sentimental songs, and all the truthful echoes of "recorded" things. But I remain unmoved at the prospect of 200 or 2,000 cinemas being "wired" for talkies except as it foretells an advance in talkie technique, which will eventually eliminate its present faults. Nor shall I become talkie "mad", (if such a condition were desirable), until somebody produces a film in the manner suggested by Pudovkin and his school, where sound is consigned to its due place in the film structure and not allowed to dominate, like a toast-master, the whole of the proceedings. The only other way of becoming talkie mad is to buy a large block of talkie shares and watch the little fellows fluctuating on the Stock Exchange. I must see what can be done, for in one form or another, everybody seems to be doing it.

*Note:* Since the above was written I have heard Mr. Meisel's synchronised rendering of *The Crimson Circle*. This places one in great danger of talkie conversion, and I have instructed my broker to delay his operations on the share market.

ERNEST BETTS.

## REASONS OF RHYME

I am writing this time of a term that suddenly came to me. As things do. On a bus for instance, shaving, talking to someone about one thing and not really conscious one is thinking of another. On a bus, rather bored . . . . wishing it was over . . . . since it is made to move, why must it keep stopping . . . . and there's not much the end of the journey, anyway . . . . that person is an inverted teapot. There! Suddenly. Someone whom you have known for years is an inverted teapot. Now you know. You have got it. You can get on. Or you are talking to someone over a drink . . . . you find you know at last why you were never really satisfied by that author, who is not entering into the conversation at all . . . . .

I was showing some people an abstract film. It was a night on which the projector worked. They hadn't seen abstract films, and I was trying to explain why it was right that such and such a set of images should be followed by another set in just that way. Why it satisfied the eye and the mind, and why the mind had to be satisfied first. I was floundering round with words like "important" and "design" and "continuity" which meant nothing to them, and suddenly I hit on it. Visual rhyme. That explained



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it, and we got on. That is why I give it you now (severely copyrighted, knowing these professionals, who pick your mind under guise of "getting together"). Visual rhyme.

What would it be?

And then, what happens when an image follows another one so satisfactorily that you are exalted?

Take any of the films which we say give intelligent pleasure, although their content is nix. *The Spy*, *Manhattan Cocktail*, *The First Kiss*; take the scene in *Movietone Follies* I wrote on last month, the singing of "Walkin' With Susie". Things follow things in a way that is immediately and inexplicably right. We feel it. It's right. Why? I suggest visual rhyming.

If there isn't any, the film is a broken disjointed affair, telling a story, and being what all those who don't go to films often enough to pick up the approach to them, say films are. So snappy, why is she going into that room now, she was coming out of it last time, where is this garden, what is happening, I always say films are so confusing. Now, Gloria's latest lamentable-film is broken and disjointed. There is not one scrap of rhyming in the sound or the pictures. One scene ends, another begins, and they only end and begin because the story says so. No visual connection, none at all. Gloria hears her "protector" is dying. She calls for her wrap and flies off. We are plunged from this into a remarkably naïve few feet of film showing a car's bonnet going along a road with attendant noises. Next scene, Gloria arrived at sick man's house. Have we experienced any sense of travelling with her? We have not. And do we know what she felt in that car? We do not.

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Whereas if we had seen her leaving all in a state and arriving even more so, we should at least have had dramatic continuity. If we had seen her flying out of her apartment, and then rushing upstairs in the other house, we might have had a visual continuity, had stairs and figure been balanced rightly and connectedly. But it would have been accidental, because this film is directed as badly as it is written and reproduced.

But take *The Spy*. The scene of the tea party between the spy-girl and Willy Fritsch. As she moves to offer him something, he pulls her hands down and as she is drawn to him, Lang cuts to a shutter coming down over a shop. We are told that the party has gone on late for tea, and also have a visual rhyme, which is continued by shot of a boy with an evening poster, downwards as the arm and the shutter; having been made aware of time and other things, we cut into the room and see them surprised to hear the evening papers being called, which we already knew was happening. The matter is related, and the way the incidents which express it are shown is made to rhyme visually. It is the same with a later sequence. After the man has left, the girl, a devout Russian, goes to a prie-dieu, and her fingers lift a plaque, which is a bookmark. They mix, I think, into the same fingers holding the same plaque in a taxi, which is taking her to a cabaret, where she is to sup with the young man. Or the young man may have the plaque, it is nearly a year since I saw the film. But the main point is that this taxi, unlike Gloria's, links on the two things. The circle of the plaque is rhymed with a boxing ring, surrounded by dancers. We do not see them at first, but the camera retreats



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and we find we are in the cabaret, there are dancers. And among the dancers, in the next shot, are the spy-girl and Fritsch. This is dramatic continuity, but it is exciting because it is visual rhyming. The way moving things, which in moving tell the story, fit into each other.

These images are caused by the story. Plaque, taxi, boxers, dancers are part of the story. So are the things, they are no more than things in Gloria's film. But in *The Spy* they are assembled pleasantly, and so they win. We are satisfied by their juxtaposition. This is a thing in itself. It adds its part to the expression, it embellishes and heightens what would otherwise be plain statement. *The Trespasser* is plain, bald statement. And how bald. Rhyming like this comprehends everything. Angles, cutting, light, length of shot-distances. And it must be conceived beforehand. How often you find in cutting a film that the arrangement you thought would tell your story right fails because it is visually unpleasing. You muck around, talking to yourself about flow and diagonal design, when the term "visual rhyme" would show you how to reach what you do not know you want.

Everything in cinema comes back to the eye. You are appealing to brain through eye. Or if you hold that art is expression, not communication, you are stating what you saw through your eye and subsequent reactions. The eye MUST be considered all the time. Purely technically, it must be kept ready to see for as long as possible. If your changes from long shot to semi-close up, from left to right action, from dark to light tone-predominance, are awkward, the eye is prematurely wearied. That is bad manners, and the eye

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retorts by refusing to take in any more. A change from a scene in which the blacks predominate to one in which the great mass is white may make all the difference, because it will make all the difference to your audience feeling tired, to their feeling that they want to see more, which is dependant on their being physically able to see more. It is the same with the depth of your scenes. There must be some larger connection than the dramatic between your close-ups and your long shots. The enlargement of an object enlarges the event. The enlarging of events means that they are surrounded with circumstance, are given their place not only in one scene, not only in one film, but in the life, the world, which otherwise that film does not express. It means that a sense of the infinite is reached. But you cannot swing wildly from the infinite to the confined, to the particular, just because the plot wants a glove emphasised at one point. You have to know what enlarging that glove will do to the eye and to the whole film, which is designed for the eye. You have to know whether it will upset the balance.

Balance is made up of previous and forthcoming depth of scenes, of change from near to distant shots, of tone values, and of the manner in which any thing is made to appear on the screen, from the point of angle or of action. The cause of action and the angle of entrance. Whether from left to right, whether moving across, towards or away from. Study *Berlin* for an elementary example of this care in this kind of composition. Since films deal in movement, I should say it was the angle of entrance and direction of motion that was your first concern. Having settled this, before you cut of course, you must consider how the light-unity



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will be affected. You will have learnt something of that from Mr. Potamkin. Then you may have to re-arrange. Your light may be all uneven and meaningless, though the rest is right. Then you re-arrange.

A symphony of speeds, of images moving left to right, followed by circular rotation slowing to right to left, will be nothing if the blacks and whites that are contained are all clashing. They need not correspond, anyone can see. You can have great games with your motion doing one thing, your tones another. But they must all be in one kind or another of harmony. I shrink from the word "contrapuntal", in the very act of offering you another catch-phrase! There must be no breaks, unless you want breaks. Speed must rhyme with speed and if it does'nt it must switch over to rhyme with tone. The two can mix, meet, separate. You see why images which have nothing to do with each other and are images of totally dissimilar objects can link on in a film, and perfectly dovetail, and thrill you.

You perceive now why certain Hollywood films are called pleasant—because they are poems of images meeting in light and detached, if you have the wit, from the follies of the tale. Not only objects, symbols, "images" readily grasped, but a gesture, a smile, a way of walking, a way of brushing the hair which shows when the plot makes the head bend down . . . . all these are called for, it is true, by the plot, but are finally nothing to do with it. Those downward-looking glances of Gary Cooper in *The First Kiss* and almost half of good old Gloria in her shorter films. I always think that *she*, incidentally, would make a wonderful theme in an abstract, with that quite wonderful face not having to do

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anything but recur. She has a most recurrent face, emitting man-rays. See what Cavalcanti (who one discovers, still goes on) can do with the Hessling. . . .

In the film I was showing that night, a train came out of a tunnel. The camera had been tilted so that the train came uphill from the bottom right-hand corner towards the left. Halfway across, cut to a man packing, pulling a suit case on to a bed. White rails of bed after steel lines in the sun. Case drawn across, from sunlit window-glow, after train from dark tunnel. The train had cut when it had been about to reach the centre of the screen, and the case was drawn across in immediately-following shot to middle of screen, meeting one's idea of where the train then was. I said "You see, they rhyme". Goethe said music was frozen architecture. He would have said what I propose to say in his place, that film is melting architecture. But he would have had a better word than "melting". Fluid, perhaps. For film deals with mass, and insists on the innate relationship of things. The sense of unity, that is, which is clamped by rhyme. And don't shout 'what about free verse?' at me, for rhyme is there too, if less obviously and cheaply. Ting-ti-ti-ting. We know that though nothing remains stationary on the screen, nevertheless, the film can attain a form. Image gives way to image and in the manner of giving way, builds up the form. We have, through rhythm, harmony of speeds and through image-in-light, harmony of tone. These combine to create an architecture which is none the less architecture for not being only in space, but in time. We cannot see the component parts all together, we have to bear the impression of one while a new one takes it place.



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Thus is something built in time. We are able to bear the impression in proportionate degree to the rhyming of the parts, the dovetailing of the images. That is the connecting rod, the stalk to the flower, the axle to the wheels, the cup, not the cream, to the coffee. That is why "visual rhyme" seemed to me to have got somewhere. At the end of a film, we have a conception of the film as a whole, a piece of flowing architecture. But the harmony which has gone to the making of it must be controlled as much by the way the screen is filled as by the speeds with which it is filled. Rhyme is as important as rhythm. That is what I am saying. I have always been saying that the selection of images and their order is important. These are your bricks. Place them. You work in mass. For God's sake, work on something mass-ive.

ROBERT HERRING.

## LACHMAN AND OTHERS

Let us now praise famous men. From Adolph Zukor to Napoleon, and William Fox to Cecil B. De Mille. Having hitched our wagon to the sublime at the thought of Joe Schenck let us proceed to carry out the corpse, singing together.

Wardour Street is worried. Its oracles are off their lunch.

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On the one hand the public don't want talkies; on the other they are ready to eat them up. Hollywood reports no more silent pictures. British studios are as silent as the grave. The experts predict an immediate boom in British production. Others say it's dead.

It is. But it won't lie down.

Meanwhile, doubt not that there is a banking account which shapes our balance sheet, distort it how we will. The past few weeks have seen the rise and fall of the usual meteors, have given birth to the usual twaddle. A prominent critic, according to a gossip writer, has a brother who is a grocer. Our sympathies are with the grocer. The typical American Girl, via Fox Movietone News, was introduced to the great cinema public. Our sympathies are with the Typical American Man. The talkies are still here to stay. The silent picture is not dead. The third-dimension is upon us. D. W. Griffiths, in his next picture, aims at a fourth dimension. Maurice Elvey no doubt has a fifth in mind. Colour is about to descend on the screen.

Meanwhile, London is inundated with talkies. One or two are fair, more are interesting, still more are appalling, while yet more are ghastly. The public like a hero with a cave-man voice. And the best heroines have voices like the bleating of a distant goat.

Out of the riot of saxophones, motor horns, fire alarms, telephones, typewriters, revolver shots, kettle drums, and mammy songs there emerge three pictures which are extremely interesting, three pictures which indicate the trend of the new entertainment, which, by reason of their very shortcomings, help the producer in keeping to the right road.



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These are the three: *Under the Greenwood Tree*, a British picture made by Harry Lachman, *Gentlemen of the Press*, a Paramount film, and *The Cocoanuts*, also a Paramount concoction.

The first is an effort—only an effort mark you—to make a SOUND FILM. The second is a successful attempt to reduce a fairly intelligent play to the screen. The third is an unquestionably successful reproduction of a musical comedy theme.

Of the three, the Lachman picture is the most likely one to be questioned. Anyone considering that *Cocoanuts* is not a satisfactory rendering of the trivialities of musical comedy should contrast it with such rubbish as *The Desert Song*. The alleged newspaper film has no competitor against which it can be offset.

The merits and demerits of the trio deserve analysis. Let me say at once that I consider none of them great pictures. That need hardly be said. But there is in each something which makes them more interesting than the other growlies, something upon which producers can work in their march to sound-cinema.

\* \* \*

I detest institutions, old and new. Edgar Wallace and the *Pilgrim's Progress*, psycho-analysis and Vitamin A, Charles Dickens and *The Daily Mail*. In consequence I know nothing of Thomas Hardy. He is generally considered by English critics to have been a great writer. That rather handicaps him in my opinion. However, we will give him the benefit of the doubt.

If Hardy was a great writer, then, he must have had an

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attack of George Meredith when he wrote *Under the Greenwood Tree*. The book, when I read it a few weeks ago, struck me as a severe pain. *The Evening Standard* described it as a 'lyric masterpiece.'

But as film material it is bluntly impossible. No company should ever have bought it. Whatever virtues it has are in its literary treatment. Its story, a silly feuilleton spineless sort of thing, deals solely with the romance of a school teacher and the pretty boy who leads the village church orchestra.

Granting that the story should never have been produced, Lachman has made an heroic job of it. As was only to be expected, however, the Elstree cutters have methodically pulled the picture to pieces. I hesitate to use the word *montage*. It is almost an institution these days; but this picture bore traces of a rhythmic flow, a building up of sequence, which has previously been gloriously absent from any British picture. Enter the scissors, snipping and dancing. Sequences are sliced, cut, chopped, hacked.

The result is JERK. The picture not only loses its smoothness, but it loses any chance it might have had, despite its story, of being a good picture in the artistic sense. It is further handicapped by being jammed up with singing sequences. It remains as a tribute to Lachman's resourcefulness that he did give *reasons* for the singing. He tried to disguise the fact that he was dragging music in to pad the footage. But we are too used to the game to be blinded.

*Under the Greenwood Tree* has perhaps the best direction yet produced from a British studio. The camera is a camera, the players are types, and not small part masters. The



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scenes are layed out with an eye to composition. The pictorial values are sound, if of the picture-postcard type. This is a candy-box picture. As such it is a sound piece of work. The sound, too, is used quite neatly. It is not dragged in to remind the audience that the orchestra are on the dole. It helps the so-called story.

A curious picture. A difficult piece of work to sum up. It proves, first and foremost, the imbecility of letting one man make a picture and another cut it. The day will come when the professional editor is unknown in our studios. When that happens we may make commercial pictures which don't insult the intelligence of a whelk. But we shall have to get some more good directors, first.

Secondly, it proves the fact, where the commercial or propaganda cinema is concerned, that you can't make bricks without straw. Whoever selected Hardy's book as a film story ought to be politely pensioned off by some well organised charity.

Lachman once made a short film called *Wine and Water*. A simple, elementary piece of work, it was shown at the Film Society, where it proved highly popular. It showed an eye for types, real types, a sense of camera, and an ability to make entertainment without a story but with one solitary idea. One day British International will give him a story. He will then produce a picture. Until then he will continue wasting good touches on silly material.

*Under the Greenwood Tree* is a picture to be seen. It teems with faults, but the direction transcends them.

*Gentlemen of the Press* is as different from the Hardy film as any two pictures could be. The one is an attempt to make

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something cinematic out of the sentimental banalities of a 'lyric masterpiece,' the other is a serious effort which seeks to produce an intelligent stage play as a film.

The commercial talkie, generally, falls into two groups. The musical and comedy group, and the serious, photographed stage play. Of the two, the latter is by far the more dangerous. Few people will have difficulty in seeing through the screen musical comedy. They are not likely to confuse it with cinema. But the screen play, with studied dialogue, and a real theme, is likely to be mistaken for a talking film.

*Gentlemen of the Press* is an example. It has the theme of the self-sacrificing life of the newspaper man. It weaves a cynical way through the New York world, reducing it to terms of front page stories, finding a gossip par in every street, showing the eternal dissatisfaction of the newshound, showing at the same time that curious attraction which journalism has, the grip by which it keeps its disciples fast. Sentimentalised for dramatic purposes, it builds a solid stage story around the paper game, shows the rise of a night editor, tells how he quits the racket in order to make more money as a publicist, only to return to the typewriters in the end.

Its dialogue is sound. It isn't brilliant. One can't expect the Millennium. But it has brains. Its atmosphere, though dramatised, is the newspaper atmosphere. A sequence in which a publicist flings a Press party is glorious. Only a Pressman could appreciate its delightful satire. It is doubtful, indeed, whether the Great British Public will appreciate the picture. They probably won't understand it. After all, it is difficult to believe that the people who pay



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money to see *Broadway Melody* could enjoy a plot which virtually turns on the difference between a good news story and a bad.

But it is not cinema. Not in the remotest degree. There is nothing cinema in it.

Except the words, "It's a Paramount Picture."

People come in front of the camera, mouth their lines, make their exits. Stage. From beginning to end. Not the silly London West End stage. A little better than that. A stage which is trying hard to be intelligent.

And therein lies the danger. It is easy enough to ridicule the *Singing Fool*. We know exactly where we are when seeing it. *Broadway* presents no difficulties. *The Glad Rag Doll* we know to be made of nothing but sawdust. Particularly mentally. There can be no deception there.

But it will be a thousand pities if *Gentlemen of the Press* is to be the forerunner of more of its type. We shall have to become dramatic critics on the spot. Happily, the danger is unlikely.

It is much too subtle for the paying public.

Lastly, *The Cocoanuts*. Here, in my opinion, we have entertainment par excellence. Not cinema entertainment, necessarily, but the sort of entertainment which makes you see the show twice. If you have the capacity to laugh *Cocoanuts* must be practically irresistible. It is more than funny. It is riotous. The gags follow so quickly that you miss the second through laughing at the first.

*Cocoanuts* is the best effort to date to make a screen musical comedy. Its species is clearly defined and no one is

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expected to call it cinema, despite the fact that Florey's touch is plainly noticeable here and there.

Most of the future of the talking cinema can be found in the picture. Its clowning is stage clowning, its patter stage patter, its production is undisguised Shaftesbury Avenue. But it gives an intimacy with the players which the stage can never give. When they can do a show like this in natural colour, with something which is not a third dimension but which looks like it, we can begin making pictures to please ourselves. And then show them on the quiet to a steadily decreasing patronage.

I wish I could think the reverse. But contact with the box-office makes pessimists of us all.

\* \* \*

Meanwhile, Wardour Street continues worrying. Its family life has been tried in the balance and the Sunday papers and found wanting. Although what's a family or two between friends! The producers, according to the Press, have not made up their minds as to whether they should be gentlemen or merely act like them.

Universal have bought the film rights of *All Quiet on the Western Front*. It will probably be dedicated to the United States Marine, and prove to be *All Noisy on the Western Electric*.

Gloria Swanson was mobbed by 5,000 fans at the New Gallery. I was glad to see it. A relatively unimportant man named Pudovkin was given quite as much publicity. The number of tears shed at the Empire during the run of *Madame X* would have filled a swimming bath. And then some. *Broadway* is packing them in at the Regal. I made



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a joke about the fact that there is only one *Broadway*, last month, unfortunately.

A British masterpiece called *High Treason* is doing curious things at the box-office. According to Gaumont publicity, the scenes at the pay-box reminded the manager of *Metropolis*. They may have done. The picture didn't.

John McCormack is reputed to be getting £80,000 for his Fox talkie. Carl Brisson didn't get that for his performance in the Elstree masterpiece, *The American Prisoner*.

The Film Society's coming programme has left the trade unmoved.

HUGH CASTLE.

## A TRAGEDY

It happened in Regent Street, London, on the morning of August 27th, 1929. But it had been developing for months. It developed at the core, from that queer device which hit London in the projection box more than a year ago. The device by means of which every silver screen was, in future, to be heard as well as seen.

For five or six years, the people who really make fortunes out of films had fought against the idea. Everything had been running in well defined grooves, but the extra trouble connected with the new device was seen as a check upon the

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smooth running of the machine and likely to ruin the financial harvests. To support them in their determination they even took heed of those who said there was an art in silence; and immediately made a big noise about it.

But the folks who made larger fortunes out of watts and wireless than the film folks had made out of films, saw that there was a limit to the market even of megohms for the millions. So, as a *cause of progress* behind which to throw their weight, the equipping of cinemas and studios for sound-films was weighed and found good. There was the opposition to overcome, of course. But money talks sure enough. And as the larger sum talks loudest, finally the films were talking too.

As if darkness had suddenly lifted, the film folks now saw clearly that they had been quite wrong about the art of silence. They occupied every available square inch of print in which to make their confessions by pointing out that the new idea was a progressive step towards the realisation of the complete art.

Alone again, the intelligent critics were in despair. For submerged beneath a flood of new interest they were, after all their struggles, again without a public. It was difficult to know what to do. Those who continued to be intelligent were called "reactionary". And there was a lot to be said for the argument that it was useless to write intelligently if the people one wanted to get to merely called one "precious" and took no further heed.

When the three Russian gentlemen who knew a lot about making silent films, and the mid-European musicians who had composed a lot of very fine scores for them, issued their



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favourable pronouncements on the sound-film, the situation for the critics was eased. Such voices lent prestige to the new idea, and enabled one to step back into the arena with less ill grace. Like straw to the drowning, the now well-worn "counterpoint" became the new means of support.

But to clutch at an idea and espouse its cause without the aid of deep rooted conviction leads into difficulty and danger. Tragedy began to develop. The astute Russian analysis of the three periods of development—particularly, it seems, the "terrible" second period—was either forgotten or completely overlooked. Every moment in a film when what was heard differed from what was seen was a moment of possibility; and possibilities were diligently sought for in every commercial release. One after another the critics began to affect us with their enforced fever and sent us hopping like carrion to pick morsels from the bodies of otherwise worthless films. Here a cadenza of street noise tracing the rhythm of opening and closing doors, there a pattern of legs developed in counterpoint to a song in jazz. Here, again, diminutive figures in long-shots and voices faint with distance; and there, space . . . movement . . . and the microphone picking up the sound of it all. And this trifling nonsense was hallowed in the name of sound and visual imagery.

There was none of the accustomed analysis of whether and what the film gained from all this trickery. Still less were there evidences of the intrinsic qualities of the film itself. Crook plays and cabarets, follies and speakeasies, there was not a vital idea in any one of them. Where once imagination had been demanded of the silent film there was ecstasy

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whenever the sound-film triumphed over the shackles of the microphone and recovered some of the movement and flexibility of old. In truth, there was a greater richness of idea and wealth of imaginative meaning in a thug film like *The Racket*, than in all of these.

When the word went round that Herr Edmund Meisel, the mid-European pioneer of counterpoint sound and sight, had finished synchronising *The Crimson Circle*, and that it was soon to be shown in London, one was relieved to think that the critics were soon to be restored from a temporary lapse. It was awaited with eager impatience.

At last, on the morning of August 27th, *The Crimson Circle* was to be shown at the New Gallery, to the Trade, the Press, and members of the Film Society. Publicity literature on the subject explained that each character and each salient detail of the film had a musical motif written round it. Detective Yale, a "Yale" motif; the *Crimson Circle*, a "Crimson Circle" motif (threatening, haunting); a love scene between Thalia and Jack, "Thalia" and "Jack" motifs (contrapuntal) and so on; which would be interwoven into musical patterns in harmony with the dramatic conditions under which they severally appeared together on the screen.

In print, it all seemed fraught with imaginative possibilities. The house was filled with guests, including some whose enthusiasm brought them in off the street without the formality of an invitation. All felt mildly excited when the lights went down.

The film opened with a scene of detective Yale in his study, seen as if by a dog lying on the hearth-rug. So far no one has discovered why.



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The "Yale" motif is heard, strange, expectant; rather like a gramophone running at the wrong speed. Inspector Parr is announced. "Parr" motif, then "Parr" and "Yale" motifs interwoven in conversational undertones, but still in the strange timbre of a gramophone turning too fast. This oddness was persistent. It was disconcerting too. One listened and forgot to see clearly. Brief moments were reminiscent of Stravinsky's scorings for the ballet, there were others operatic in complexity, but still strangely "sharp". In the theatre and cabaret scenes the gramophone effect was most strongly marked. It was like playing with a split needle. I was uneasy and felt responsible for it all as when the soprano "cracks" or an utter stranger rises to make a speech and collapses in the first sentence. I did my best to cling to the memory of "Berlin" symphony but was reminded only of Paul Whiteman and Gershwin's "Rhapsody in Blue".

Neither were the "effects" dramatic nor impressive. When someone is seen typing and tapping noises are heard, whether it is the typewriter itself or "composed" tappings that are heard; substantially, it is *hearing* what is *seen*. And that, I understand, is taboo in the best counterpoint circles. Even that would not have mattered had the result been effective.

At another moment Yale leaves Barr and an assistant, and enters the next room. We hear him fall heavily. Parr rushes to the locked door and shouts "Yale!!" Swifter than an echo a "composed" shout follows which sounds like the intake gasp of an old type motor-horn. This is repeated. The effect is something like a 'still' in which the sifter has

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moved. Its objective purpose in the film is beyond conception.

None the less if, taken as a whole, the manner of the film had been enriched by its tonal embellishments, one would treat these details as dull facets of a brilliant gem; and even condone the Edgar Wallace quality of the matter on which the manner had been lavished. But it had not. In fact, quite an opposite effect had been achieved. The screen had parted with its hypnotic magic, for attention was divided between listening and looking. Where once we rejoiced in the harmony of silence and shadow, disunity now prevailed.

HAY CHOWL.

## HEAVY STUFF

From the very beginning heavy stuff has drawn intellectuals into the cinema to scoff, and they have found it so amusing that they have stayed to scoff further. The spectacle of Jannings, as the cuckold sobbing Janningesquely in the arms of guilty Gary Cooper is something for which everyone is the sadder for having missed.

Memory as a projector in the mind, snaps back to *Waterloo*, with the mock-heroics of the general postponing preparations for a decisive engagement in order "not to



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alarm the ladies'', and the drummer-boys dying in the arms of wounded warriors. To recall the menace which the extras put into the movements of their swords before they engaged in battle (fighting Chinese fashion and attempting to vanquish the enemy by pulling horrid faces) is to re-enjoy a hearty laugh. Blücher had brought the almost forgotten art to perfection and could manipulate his eyebrows in the most incredible undulations.

In the same picture there was a vamp who stole a much sealed enemy document; she read it every alternate second and occupied the rest of her time in staring into the lens with half closed eyes.

We are grateful to Henny Porten for romping through a love scene in *Love in a Cowshed* with a warehouse, full of most useful but somewhat shy-making domestic utensils, as background!

To return to Jannings and Gary Cooper; for, as we are no respecter of persons, we would like to show what *The Film Arts Guild* has done for America, apart from putting wise-crack titles into *Warning Shadows*!

Lewis Milestone was lucky to have been instructed in Swiss local colour by an optimist. All the inhabitants of his village retain national costume on which everlasting snow falls softly. (Special effect for the sonorous film?) Gary Cooper, as an artist from Vienna, has a fur coat. Esther Ralston falls for Gary, or the fur coat, but is forced by relentless parents to marry the Mayor.

Young Gary, faithful to his promise, returns to claim his bride on the day the picturesque village is celebrating nuptials for Jannings and Esther. Camera moves down the

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festive table. Male extras are imitating the great tragedian; wiping beer from moustaches with coat-sleeve, winking eyes smugly at females. Oh! Mr. Jannings, that they should steal your stuff is unprofessional and a dirty trick BUT it is shattering to see a chorus of Janningses going through a routine as slickly as the Tiller girls; a sight to be treasured!

Goldylocks, our heroine, changes her wig from plaits to shingles; moreover, we can tell that time has elapsed from the presence of two youngsters who use pea-shooters on papa. Gary comes back every year, for Esther's birthday party, specially to draw the inscription on the birthday cake. (We fear that Mr. Cooper could not have been much of an artist; we saw his effort in close-up!)

Soft music. Why did you come back? I could not help myself, something stronger than I, etcetera. You must never come again. But to-night is still left to us, let us be happy to-night!

They steal the toboggan from the two children, under the eternal grown-up pretext of joining in the game. They crash! Gary is mortally wounded, Esther is dead.

Of course all the men at the birthday party try to dance with the girl who brings the news; Jannings himself cuts a few capers with her before the cigar falls from his mouth and the guests leave in silence, with bowed heads. Esther is laid on her death-bed, the children burst into the room to wake mother up. Wurlitzers, chocolates stuffed with pink cream, and handkerchiefs with *Quelques Fleurs*.

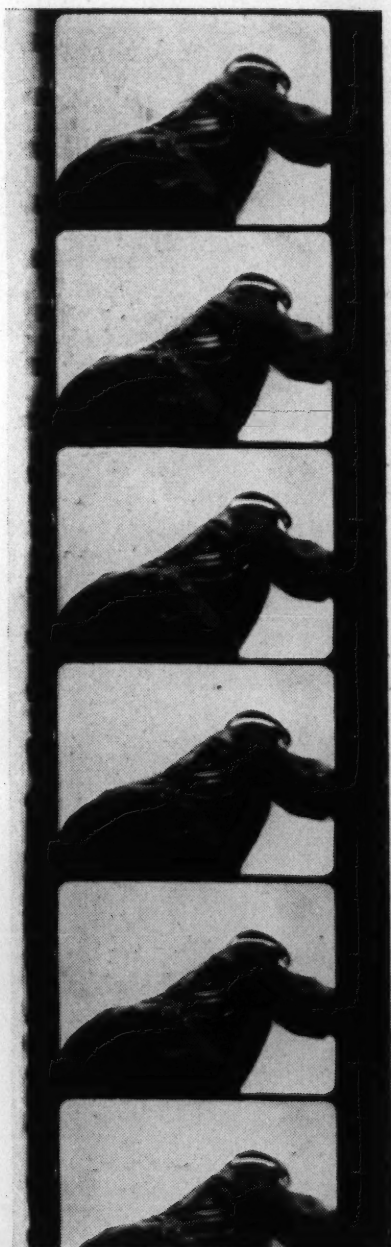
Dear, dear, dear, all these excitements cannot be good for such an old man, think, also, of what Jannings went through in *The Street of Sin*; when he almost raped a Salvation Army



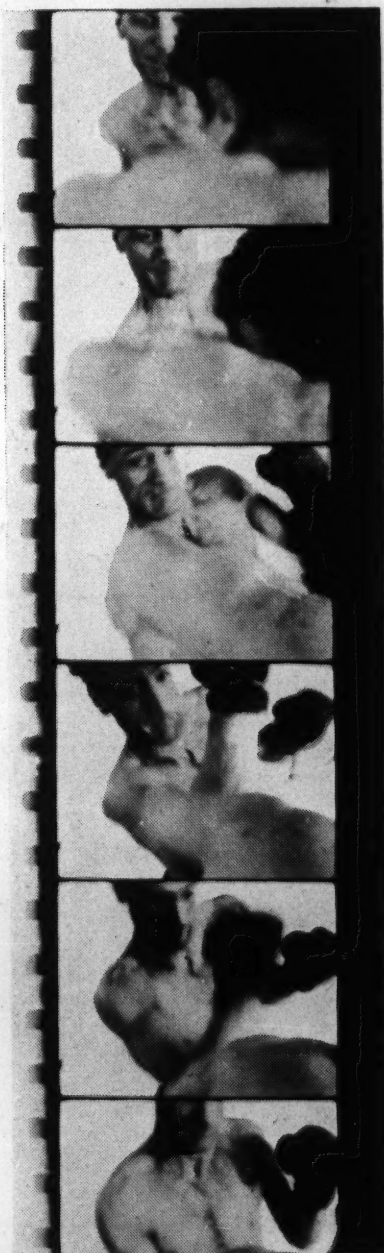


*Ombres et Lumieres*, a film by Gussy Lauwson. See *The Independent Cinema in Belgium* by Carl Vincent in this issue.



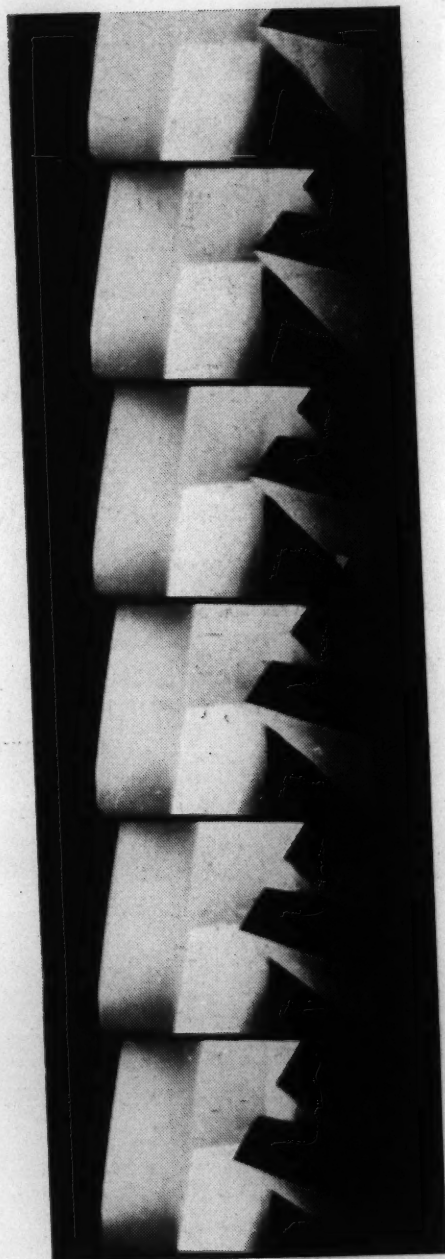


*Impatience*, a film by the young Belgian artist, Charles Dekeukeleire.



*Combat de Boxe*, by Charles Dekeukeleire. See The Independent Cinema in Belgium in this issue.





*Impatience*, by Charles Dekeukeleire.



*Turksib* (*Turkestan Siberian Railway*), a Russian film directed by Turin. Below, the Kirghis are admiring the first auto car they have ever seen.

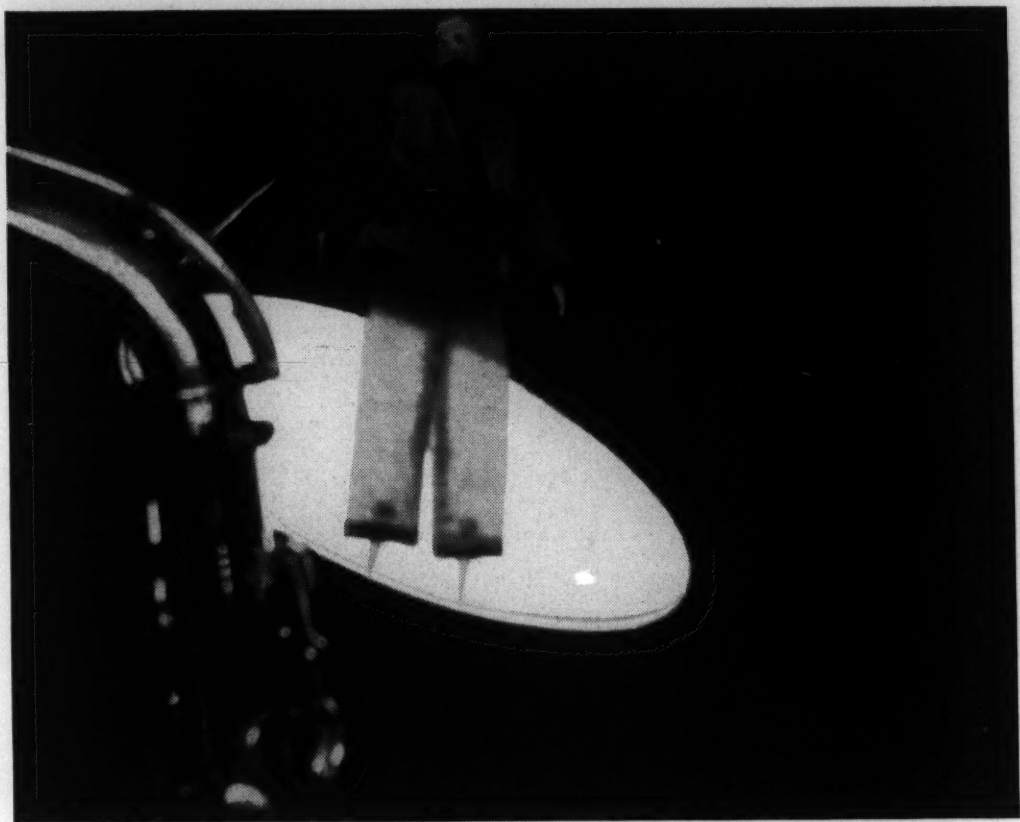






The Wufku studios at Kiev, recently very greatly enlarged and re-equipped.





*Monkeys' Moon*, a POOL film in the Studio Films series by Kenneth Macpherson, which will be seen in England during the winter.







*Under the Greenwood Tree*, a British International Sound film by Harry Lachman. See Lachman and Others, by Hugh Castle in this issue.



*The Rails are Sounding*, one of the new Sovkino films, the theme of which is the development of a railway system.



The beginning of a film. A mysterious effect during the building of sets for *Under the Greenwood Tree* at the British International Studios.



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lass. (He always was too slow about this sort of thing to make a success of it!)

The plot calls for further demonstrations. Searching through his wife's clothes he discovers a letter from Gary calling on Esther to break the news to her husband that one of the boys is illegitimate. Gary, it appears, wanted to take his own son to Vienna and give him the chance to get a fur coat!

Imagine how that gives Jannings a fresh start for mouth and eye acrobatics! Yes, we did not tell you that this picture is called *Betrayal*, we thought that might spoil your surprise!

Off to the hospital where Gary is dying. A nurse makes no effort to stop the ensuing scene, the excitement of which precipitates the patient's end. However, she wears a quaint pointed cap which lends interest to the composition. You see this is a Jannings picture, an art picture, the sort of thing *The Film Arts Guild* has been advocating; the story may be a little silly but the ART creeps into the background, into the angles and all the rest. *The Film Arts Guild* went to such a lot of trouble to snap up the story of *Joyless Street* because they discovered so much ART in the unusual settings of war-shattered Vienna!

The reader can guess the rest of the story of *Betrayal*; how Jannings nearly hurls a child from the top of a studio mountain, and how the love of a trusting innocent, etc.

January, 1930, will see the general release of a Russian picture, *Ivan the Terrible*, which contains some high pressure records; all forms of torture are photographed richly amidst beautiful fabrics. The art is in the background, without

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question; and, although the picture is not great, it is exciting. In spite of the exceptionally heavy sadistic stuff we were never moved to disrespectful laughter. There is a scene when Ivan has blinded a tiresome clown with scalding soup, and the jester's cap lies, where it has rolled, at the foot of the throne. Ivan has the idea of humiliating a boyard by forcing him to don the cap. Had Mr. Milestone directed the picture it would not have mattered who had been chosen as the victim of the little prank; it would have been vitriolic Ivan whose head the cap fitted.

In other words intellectuals are welcome to their mirth, we film-lovers are entitled to it ourselves, for it is not the fault of the cinema that *Waterloo*, *The Street of Sin*, *Betrayal*, and the rest of the ordinary heavy stuff is such pleasant material for scoffers.

OSWELL BLAKESTON.

## EPOCH

The first tele-talkie has been produced by Capt. Baird. By fives we went into a little room: were lined up, shortest in the front, tallest to the rear, and told to stare at a mahogany box with a screen about as large as a magazine page. Method was sound on film: matter was assorted stills of His Majesty, The Prince of Wales, and animated



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pictures of various performers. By craning, a duet could just squeeze their heads into the frame. Actually the film was being relayed from another room, but we were told that fifty miles would present no difficulty, and that the screen could be enlarged to the size of a door.

Sound and synchronisation pretty nearly technically perfect; images quite distinct, and curiously plastic owing to high chiaroscuro, but very yellow in tone.

We were, in effect, back in that penny peep show which Edison tried to endow with phonograph synchronisation. Prophecy in these circumstances is excusable. Television itself suggests the time not far distant when the radio performer will appear—in colour and stereoscopy, no doubt, unless there is another Flood—on the home screen. That does not affect the cinema at all, because the essence of the cinema (or one essence) is that it is made in many different places and at many different times before being assembled. A stage play may be televised, but it will not be cinema or anything like it: it would aim no great blow at the cinema as an art or an industry. Nor would the contemporaneous exhibition of a battle in China, or a New York murder trial.

But we must consider next the televising of a full talking-colour-stereoscopic film made in the normal way in a normal factory. This does not affect the art of the screen at all: only the economics. From some central tower a master copy of the film will be relayed to a big cinema, to a chain of provincial cinemas, and to a million private homes. Expense of receiving sets will slightly limit the number of the latter, and desire for company will still bring people to the public hall. Perhaps the programme will be diversified

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by televised variety, acted at the same moment: certainly the theatre will have to give many new attractions to bring folk from the fireside. The precise effect of this on renters, showmen and producing companies is, of course, still too obscure to make prophecy valuable. It is probable, however, that broadcast film will be national in sentiment. One sees government monopolies. Who will be the first Minister for Films?

R. d'E. BURFORD.

## POUR LA DEFENSE DU CINÉMA ARTISTIQUE

Récemment encore, nous singalions, ici même, la nécessité d'une entente entre cinéphiles et metteurs en scène indépendants, pour permettre aux uns comme autres de sauvegarder l'intérêt du film personnel. La constitution de clubs privés dans bon nombre de villes européennes était un premier pas dans cette voie. Le principe d'association demeure à la base de toute activité fructueuse et l'on a constaté avec satisfaction que de telles initiatives furent généralement bien accueillies. Les effectifs de ces groupements d'amateurs de films de qualité, assez minces au début, se grossirent bientôt de tous les esprits curieux de formules d'art nouvelles. Mais la liaison n'était pas assurée de façon



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rationnelle entre les divers clubs constitués, entre ces clubs et les artistes indépendants du film, aussi. Aux puissantes organisations des producteurs de films industriels il fallait opposer un bloc défensif et pour cela rassembler les foyers épars du cinéma artistique et indépendant, créer une centrale de location, où viennent converger les essais isolés des auteurs de mérite. Assurer à la fois une plus grande facilité de composition des programmes des séances de clubs privés et encourager, rétribuer même les efforts des artistes indépendants, voilà ce que permettra une telle organisation. Est-il besoin de dire qu'elle était d'élémentaire nécessité !

Sur l'initiative de Mr. Robert Aron, de *Du Cinéma*, un *Congress International Du Cinéma Indépendant* a été convoqué à La Sarraz, dans le pittoresque château de Madame de Mandrot, qui siégera du 2 au 7 Septembre. Son but : atteindre aux objectifs signalés ci-dessus. A ce jour, le Congrès a déjà réuni les délégations de 12 pays différents. Signalons, au nombre des personnalités éminentes du monde cinématographique qui nous occupe : Cavalcanti, René Clair, Moussinac, Hans Richter, Ruttmann, Lupu Pick, Eisenstein, Marinetti, Prampolini et Alberto Sartoris, déjà présents. Une petite Société des nations, comme on le voit, dont les décisions seront, aux yeux des cinéphiles, pour le moins aussi importantes que celles prises à Genève par les gouvernements. Mais tandis que ces derniers songent à désarmer sans hâte ni conviction, à La Sarraz c'est d'armement qu'il est question, armement rapide et minutieux, mobilisation générale de toutes les unités agissantes, préparation de plans de campagne définis en vue d'assurer au film artistique sa place au soleil et aux gourmets des salles

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obscurer un régal, au moins, par semaine. De toute évidence, les pionniers de l'art cinématographique, réunis dans l'austère demeure de Madame de Mandrot, ne traiteront pas à la légère les questions à l'ordre du jour. On y fera de bon travail, n'en doutons pas, si l'on ne s'abandonne à des discussions byzantines.

FREDDY CHEVALLEY.

## THE INDEPENDENT CINEMA CONGRESS

An international congress of the independent cinema was held from the second to the seventh of September at the chateau of Madame de Mandrot at la Sarraz.

S. M. Eisenstein was present as delegate from Russia. He came at the last moment (the other two delegates not having been able to obtain the Swiss visa) accompanied by his assistant G. Alexandroff and his cameraman E. Tisse. Alberto Cavalcanti, Leon Moussinac, Janine Boussounouse, J. G. Auriol and Robert Aron (who was president of the congress) represented France, Walter Ruttmann, Hans Richter and Bela Balazs came from Germany (Pabst was prevented from being present) J. Isaacs and Ivor Montagu from England, Montgomery-Evans from the United States, F. Rosenfeld from Austria, Prampolini and Sartoris from Italy, M. Franken from Holland, Moituro Tsuytja and Hijo



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from Japan, Caballero from Spain, and from Switzerland Guye, Schmitt, Kohler and Masset.

There were several difficulties at the beginning. The nature of the independent film (formerly *avant garde* film) was not understood in the same way by different members of the Congress. Thus, for example, Hans Richter was rather perturbed that Pabst had been invited, for, said he, Pabst made "spielfilms", that is films with plot and action, with professional actors. It was clear that Richter understood that only absolute and abstract films could be denominated independent films.

It has often enough been pointed out that the absolute film is definitely a genre of cinema interesting in itself, but at once an error if it is considered as the only possible manifestation of cinema, that is to say as soon as cause and effect are confused. It seems to me negligible and of secondary importance whether a film is made with living or inanimate objects if it has its own integrity.

At last a basis was found. And practical discussion became possible. The results of this discussion are the creation of an International League of Independent Cinema and of a co-operative of production. The League will have for its principal aim distribution among the already existing clubs (such as the Film Society or Film Liga) and the creation of films of note. Naturally the films produced by the co-operative will be contained in the programmes of these clubs. The League will also distribute current films which for one reason or another could not be released in the commercial theatres, on the condition, of course, that their cinegraphic value justifies the idea.

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Most important, though not always of the most practical value, is the contact of various groups all over the world whose aim is the furtherance of good films.

It was decided also to send a petition to the Institut International Intélectuel at Rome, asking for favourable conditions in respect of censorship and quota for films of the co-operative and those which the League will distribute; a justifiable demand, since these productions will be confined to a public already educated and intelligent, and able to furnish sufficient guarantee of moral responsibility.

The big event was the arrival of S. M. Eisenstein, who the next day made a little film, in which all members of the congress played a rôle, a short comedy which will incidentally be the first production of the co-operative.

The enthusiasm of Eisenstein was so infectious that all the serious minded were tempted to forget their dignity and do as he instructed.

I shall not speak here of Eisenstein himself, who so greatly changed the aspects of the congress, but I should in any event like to proclaim my admiration for this splendidly youthful man who has to his credit *Potemkin*, *Ten Days* and *The General Line*.

We must now wait for the results of the congress. But in spite of a vivid scepticism which I maintain always toward any sort of congress, very little was said (which is well enough, since it at least prevents the usual *bêtises*) and it is to be hoped that the goodwill of all these different beings, who all more or less pursue the same ends, will lance itself strongly enough to be a real creative force.

JEAN LENAUER.



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# NEWS OF THE SOVIET CINEMA

The operator, Valenty, has set to work to photograph a full-length chronicle (news) film, *The Country of the Soviets*. The purpose of the film is to reflect the face of the country, its natural treasures, its achievements since the Revolution and its current organisation.

For the purpose of the actual photography Valenty will visit about 80 different districts in various parts of the U.S.S.R. At each of the various points where filming will take place, Valenty will get into close touch with the local organisations of the Society of Friends of the Soviet Kino. On the one hand, he will in each town have a technical cinema consultation with the local organisation of the Society of Friends of the Soviet Kino; and, on the other hand, the Society will give him information regarding the local life and discuss with him the choice of the material for the photographs. This work represents an important experiment, which, if it is successful, will be introduced into the system of Soviet cinema production.

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The Soviet of People's Commissars of the R.S.F.S.R. have accepted a resolution in regard to the supply of educational films to the masses of the people.

Over the whole territory of the R.S.F.S.R. free hire and marketing by the producing, government and social organisa-

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tions (trades unions, co-operatives, etc.)—and, in particular, by the cinema-organisations—are allowed.

By educational films are understood only films of a political-educational, scientific-educational and of a scholastic or chronicle (news) character. The purpose of these films must be to convey to the spectators information regarding some branch of knowledge of social, political and cultural life. The hiring and sale of the educational films will be effected by the corresponding organisations under the general supervision and control of Sov-Kino.

The so-called CHICHERIN courses of foreign languages are making an attempt to utilise the kino for the purpose of teaching foreign languages. In the ARTES cinema the film *Nanook* was exhibited, with specially prepared captions in the English language. The captions are drawn up in such a way that the spectator—if he had the very slightest knowledge of the language—could, comparing them with the pictures shown on the screen, grasp the meaning of the words.

The text of the captions will also be read aloud by the teacher conducting the courses, in order that the audience may master the correct pronunciation.

Exhibitions of this nature will be organised regularly every week by the director of the courses.

\* \* \*

## VOSTOK-KINO (East-Kino).

In the desert of Karakum in the country of the Turkomans the Cinematographic Group of the director, Y. Raisman and



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the scenario artist S. Ermolinsky are conducting at high speed the photographs of nature for the picture, *The Earth is Athirst*. The staging of this picture is being effected in collaboration with Meschrabpom-Film.

The scenario of the film illustrates the problem of transport in Central Asia. The action takes place in our day. The services of Turkomans have been enlisted as consultants in connection with this work.

Another series of private governmental and social exhibitions of the picture *Turksib (The Steel Road)* has been arranged. The author and director was V. A. Turin.

The picture was shown to the Pan-Federal Congress of Soviets, and met there with unanimous approval.

On June 15 of the present year, Vostok-Kino sent an expedition to the peninsula of Yamal. The route of the expedition is as follows: Archangel—Island of Kolguev—Nova Zembla—Sharapovy Koshky on the peninsula of Yamal—Lake Yarro-Togor—Obdorsk—Tazovaya Guba—city of Turukhansk—city of Krasnoyarsk. From Archangel to the peninsula of Yamal, the expedition proceeds on a small trading schooner of the polar type. From Yamal to Obdorsk the journey is across what is in the summer marshland. From Obdorsk to Turukhansk the reindeer transport of winter will be used. Finally, from Turukhansk to Krasnoyarsk, reindeer, dogs and horses will be used.

The total length of the journey will be about ten thousand kilometres. It is calculated that the expedition will cover a period of seven months. The expedition will take photo-

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graphs showing the life of the natives of these extreme northern regions of the Soviet Federation.

The following will take part in the expedition: director and operator V. Bluvstein, who had a share in the photography of the film, *The Krassin*, and the literary assistant, N. Shapnov—author of the book, *Through the Ice for Italy*.

\* \* \*

## PRODUCTION OF FILMS FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE.

At the VUFKU film-factory at Odessa, the multiplicator, T. Weissmann, is working at a children's multiplicational picture, *The Adventures of Boris Malyachuk* (scenario by G. Ivanova). Theme: the adventures of a pioneer, accidentally finding his way into an aeroplane.

At the Vufku film-factory at Kiev, the director, K. Bolotof (operator: P. Gorbenko) is organising a children's film *The Pest*, dealing with the subject of the struggle against hooliganism in the school. In the picture will be shown teaching in the school in accordance with the complex method and an excursion of the pupils.

The director, Shtrizhak, with the operator, Ya. Kulish, is setting to work on a children's film, *The Boy from the Camp* (scenario by Sharansky) dealing with a Soviet Children's Colony.

A film *Komsomol* ("Communist League of Youth") is being staged by Ya. Pechorin with the operator, D. Seda. The photographs will be taken in Kiev and the surrounding



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district. The picture is concerned with the jubilee of the Communist League of Youth.

A full-length artistic film for young people, *The Girl Student*, based on the life of women students, will be staged by director A. Kapler, in accordance with the scenario of I. Bakan.

The scenic workshop of the Kiev film-factory is working at the artistic scenario for the film *Contact*, based on the life of the Communist League of Youth, in accordance with the theme furnished by V. Okhramenko. The film presents the problem of due contact between the old and the young workers in industry. The story is concerned with the mutual relations between the young pioneer and the old workman who does not want to disclose the secrets of his trade.

The mounting of an artistic picture *The Fatal Loop*, is being completed; it is the work of the director A. Poregud. The picture describes the life of Soviet aviators. The principal parts are played by: V. Vishnevskaya, S. Magaida, P. Masokha.

The author-operator, M. Kaufmann, who took the Vufku pictures, *The Eleventh Year* and *The Man with the Movie Camera* and who staged the picture *The Creche*, is finishing the mounting of the full-length artistic film *Spring*, which will show this season of the year in all its aspects.

*In the Snowdrifts.* Director: Paul Dolina. The picture will show the Ukraine in the year 1918. On this background the drama is unfolded of a peasant girl, who is a red partisan. The chief parts in the picture are played by Z. Kordumova and S. Svashenko (hero of the films, *Zvenigora* and *Arsenal*).

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### PICTURES IN PREPARATION BY THE KIEV VUFKU FACTORY.

*Suburban Quarters.* Author, M. Bazhan. The foundation of the film is the struggle with anti-semitism and Hebrew nationalism in family life. The picture shows the life of a small town and of the Communist League of Youth.

*The Valley of Miracles.* Author, A. Ruter. An anti-religious artistic film concerned with the theme of the "miracle" in the Valley of Jehoshaphat.

*The Three Brothers.* Author, K. Koshevsky. Cinema poem about the class-struggle in the Ukraine.

*Adventures of a Soviet Khlestakov.* Full length comedy of adventure. Author, V. Okhremenko.

*Breaking Through.* Mechanisation and rationalisation of industry. Full-length film. Author, A. Ruter.

*The Secret of Rapit.* The positive type of Soviet manager. Author, M. Maisky.

*The Forest Song.* A country film. Struggle for collectivisation in the pottery industry at Polis. Author, N. Yatno.

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### CONSTRUCTION OF NEW CINEMA THEATRES.

The management of Vufku have decided to construct in the course of the next two years 15 new cinema theatres, fitting them up in such a way that it will be possible to use them for the demonstration of sound films. The possibility



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of introducing sound-films will also be kept in view in connection with the construction of village-clubs.

With this end in view Vufku is working out some plans for standard cinema theatres of the town and village type.

The management of Vufku intends to despatch one of its workers to America for the purpose of studying the problems of the sound film.

In the course of the present year 5 sound-film apparatuses will be purchased for the cinema-theatres in the Ukraine.

The director, Dovjenko, author of the films *Arsenal* and *Zvenigora*, is about to stage a film *The Earth*, with his own scenario.

\* \* \*

## THE STATE CINEMA INDUSTRY IN GEORGIA.

In preparation.

*Saba* (director Chiarily, operator Polkevich, artist L. Gudiashvily, scenarist Alkhazishvily and Aravsky). This picture has been approved by the Soviet of Arts and is being issued for hire in the cinemas of Tiflis. The theme of the picture is the decline of a working family as a result of the drunkenness of the father—a workman. It is based on the life of the tramway workers in Tiflis; the local press and the workers who have witnessed it have recognized the artistic achievements and the social significance of the picture.

\* \* \*

## CENTRAL SOVKINO FACTORY.

An expedition has set out from the Sovkino factory, headed by the director Ivanov Barkov and the operator Giber, to

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Kuban and the Mikhailovskaya desert, with a view to taking photographs for the anti-religious picture, *Juda*. This picture will include photographs of the ancient monastery "Rostov Veliky".

The director of the Sovkino factory, Poznansky (who acted as co-director on the film *Her Way*) has set to work on the photography for the picture *Needless Enmity*. The subject is the entry of women into the ranks of skilled workers and the needlessness of competition between men and women workers in industry.

\* \* \*

At the Leningrad Sovkino factory experiments have been carried out with sound photography. Records were made of a speech, singing and orchestral music. The results obtained were entirely satisfactory.

At the present time the first speaking film is being photographed at the Leningrad factory.

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## VSEVOLOD MEYERHOLD AND MESCHRABPOM-FILM.

Vsevolod Meyerhold has set to work at the Meschrabpom factory on the staging of the picture *Eugene Bazarof*, based on Turgenev's novel, *Fathers and Children*.

The idea of the film is to exhibit Bazarof as the first Russian materialist.

\* \* \*

V. I. Pudovkin, jointly with the scenarist A. Pzheshevsky,



## CLOSE UP

has finished his director's work on the setting for *Life is Good*.

In connection with the fact that this picture will be the first sound-film produced by Meschrabpom-Film, the director, L. Obolensky, who belongs to the V. Pudovkin group, is at the present time making experiments in regard to the application of the sound-kino to the Vey apparatus constructed by the engineer, P. Tager.

\* \* \*

Meschrabpom-Film is putting into effect the order of the Government in regard to the free hire of educational films. During the present year the hiring of educational films will be considerably extended.

In consideration of the fact that the market for the hire of educational films has up to now been insufficiently organised and that its further development depends entirely on the activities of the clubs and organisations which directly control the enterprises for the showing of films, Meschrabpom-Film has forwarded to these organisations a notification that it is prepared to give the maximum of support to all such organisations and clubs as are giving their attention to the hiring of and organisation of the market for cultural films.

\* \* \*

For the film *2 Buldi 2*, the director, Lev Kuleshof is taking photographs for Meschrabpom-Film in a special large-scale circus decor constructed in the courtyard of the factory.

The decor by the artist Ballyuzek reproduces an actual circus with an arena and large accommodation for spectators and for the orchestra. Four operators are to take simultaneous photographs of the acrobatic numbers, "Trio

## CLOSE UP

Okeanos", the clowning of Williams Truzzi with 20 trained horses, etc.

At the Pan-Federal Congress of Rabis, V. I. Pudovkin was elected a member of the Central Committee.

At the first session of the new presidium Pudovkin was elected chairman of the Central Committee of the Art Soviet of Sovkino.

\* \* \*

## ENCOURAGEMENT OF YOUTH.

With a view to closer contact with the State Technical School of Cinematography and to the utilisation of youthful talents, Meschrabpom-Film has entrusted the students who have completed their courses with the staging of a number of short-length pictures.

P. A.

## COMMENT AND REVIEW

### A RUSSIAN FILM.

Now that *The Waiter's Daughter* is to be shown in England a short note may have topical importance.

War is suggested by photographs, with one shot of men in snowed-in trenches.



## CLOSE UP

Proprietor of the restaurant inspects the shoes of his waiters to make certain that they have rubber soles, which will not annoy the clients. Of course THE waiter has immense holes in his shoes.

All the Wardour Street of Moscow dines at this restaurant if one is to judge by the types. That includes the villain and the general. And the waiter does all the wrong things, and looks pathetic because they curse him.

At the end of a banquet he steals some of the fruit for his daughter, while he maintains his kittenishly pathetic appearance.

His daughter plays the violin, his wife . . . well, she married him. Cat plays with a ball of wool; the news arrives that the son has been killed in one of the snowed-in trenches. The son whom we have seen, and cannot worry about as we fear he may be like his father.

The flavour is that of a Stephen Leacock version of a Russian novel.

Mother falls in a fit. The waiter drops all the plates. His wages are stopped. He loses the chance to acquire a note for 500 roubles. Wife dies. Daughter is expelled from the Academy of music . . . Even in a Russian film this is full value for one's money.

Mr. Protozanov, who directed, keeps up the misery with stolen documents, and a would-be raper of the fair daughter. Spider and the fly. You will know me by the orchid in my buttonhole, etc. Malinovskaja is the girl, Tchekhov the waiter.

O. B.

A NEW FORCE IN THE BRITISH CINEMA.

"There is a difference between a cameraman and a photographer."

"Criticism is all very well, but one must start sometime to make films oneself."

Such are the deracinating remarks of Mr. J. Grierson, who has made the best, and most Russian, British film.

The swish of the sea, and the pulling in of nets; two short beats, one long. White houses; seamen with white parcels under their arms; white seagulls; the white light house, temple of white light; the high seas and white breakers.

Two miles of nets; the sky darkens.

What adventure in the words "mizzen" and "spanker", words from the boys' books of adventure. And one man keeps watch till dawn. A slumbering boy is roused, in the most unaffected manner, to take his part in the labour of pulling in the nets.

Dog-fish and congers, destroyers, move between the shoals. (Sequence taken in a tank with several exposures. All the fish pour in one direction except a few, in the last exposure, and this clever piece of production gives the sensation of speed.)

Storm. More steam for the straining winch. How pleased we are for these sailors, so natural in their close ups, when this monotonous task is over.

If we cannot learn it from Eisenstein, from Mr. Grierson, let us learn that working men are the best actors.

Visual metaphor, a whale. Heavy, sludgy.

Full speed ahead, through the storm seas to get first



## CLOSE UP

to the market. Seas crash over the bows; men downstairs take food, the stoker gives himself a light from the burning coals.

Market. Sea superimposed. Swish. Clang. Bell rung in foreground. Optically printed mixes. Barrels. Barrels swinging from crane, and the film cut to the rhythm.

*Drifters* will make Mr. Grierson's reputation throughout the world, he needs no puff. We would rather keep our breath for shouting "Hurrah".

O. B.

## TWO EXHIBITIONS.

At the International Exhibiton of the London Salon of Photography there is an advertisement for *Sunkist*, which shows a hazy liquid matching the crinkles in a beaten tray; there is a screen effect with a parrot's shadow; there is a study of a receding wave in mournful tones of flat sepia; there is a corrugated sunshade with sleek balloons; there are black luminous ducks on luminous water; there is a design, by Hiromu Kira, of small black shafts against white mass; there are ambery lights in a print of some earthenware pots; there are the beaded droppings from a guttering candle; but there is nothing to compare with the vital modernisms in *controlled* light, which are familiar to everyone in touch with the art movements.

## CLOSE UP

That we are not exaggerating can be proved by the fact that the plates of Cecil Beaton are considered "freak". We wonder if the critic, who used this word in a West End paper, ever heard of Francis Bruguière, or is acquainted with the work he did several years ago?

The omission of several names is perturbing. Surely we could have been spared the old stuff with the nude girl and the fan, or the little sun of light? And is a portrait really interesting because a girl holds a tray behind her head? And when are we to see the end of the snap-shots of oil, reflections, speckled black and white halation, deep set backgrounds, steps broken off, modern houses looked up at, scaffolding, squared light behind a sitter's head, heads of old men with one lamp cast upwards on the sweating brow, certain aspects of a roof? Is it terribly clever to take a picture of Elsa Lanchester's arm-pit, or somebody else's feet in a boat?

We believe that photography is an art, closely allied to cinematography; but, the light must be controlled. It is mere journalism to take an arrangement of oil drums on a wharf, or a pile of herrings. The journalist is not responsible for the grouping or the lighting. Moreover, the nudes and curves of cardboard are not the best subjects for the seeker of better things.

P. Dubreuil's jazz studies should be mentioned but they are not of importance.

The Annual Exhibition of British Photography is still more disappointing. A polite Japanese student told us that he found it a good way to pick up English, consult the catalogue and look at the photo. There is certainly no



## CLOSE UP

attempt to baffle the public. There are countless heads of "Bobby", "Joan", and "Carol". There are wishy moons and smudgy nothings. There are the properties of threads of garlands, flower bowls and all the rest of the bunk. Madame Yvonne, however, has a pleasant innovation. She joins the profile of two sitters in quite an attractive manner.

The advertising work of Howard Coster has vitality, and he makes use of the trick of cutting out his heads and pasting them on a careful mount.

OSWELL BLAKESTON.

## LIGHT AND SHADE.

AN ABSTRACT FILM BY GUSSY LAUWSON

This is one of the many *avant garde* shorts which Mr. Stuart Davis is bringing to the Avenue Pavillon.

There are virile groupings of white cubes and cones rotating in light, there is the sudden movement of a varnished ball catching a high-light, there are time patterns with circular objects, and giddy effects with bars and streaks.

It is, in a way, terribly smart, terribly *à la mode*, yet cute. I should like to see it again to be able to give fuller details as it well deserves less cursory attention.

Two stills are in this issue.

O. B.

THE MYSTERY OF THE CASTLE OF DICE

I have a suspicion that the inspiration of Man Ray's new film is social rather than cinematic.

I have no doubt that the guests of the Vicomte de Noailles were entertained by Man Ray's clever photographs. His moving shots, inside the house, show us the interior of this really up-to-date villa far more fully than *Vogue* has been able to do.

The Comtesse de Montgomery, Mlle. Orlowska, M. Deshoulières, and M. M. Raval seem to enjoy lying on concrete floors and letting bars of shadow cross their faces. Other celebrities amuse themselves by wearing masks made from silk stockings.

Of course the cinematic side is not completely forgotten: I mean Mr. Ray has remembered to insert a piece of negative and to join in a sequence upside down!

A drive in a car is a little too jerky, or a little too *avant-garde*, to be pleasant.

O. B.

BOOK REVIEWS.

*Motion Pictures with Sound.* By James R. Cameron.  
(Cameron Publishing Company. Manhattan Beach,  
New York.)

In a foreword William Fox says that Fox Movietone has graduated from fact to fiction. Oh, yeah?



## CLOSE UP

I know of film lovers who are awed, at moments, by the talkies. They felt quite happy about silent Pudovkins, they knew how silent films tried to deceive the public, but not, of course, them: now, when listening to a gentleman say "I can't go on", they are troubled with a doubt, a deadly doubt that they are as much in the dark about this new form of the art of light as their neighbour. After reading Mr. Cameron's manual they will be freed from inhibition, in fact they will feel an itch to run behind the scenes and help the operator in times of stress.

It is all rather matter of fact, but the four hundred pages give the reader a real line-up. The history of the talkie began to be hectic in 1873 when Willoughby Smith demonstrated, to the world of Science, the properties of selenium; which alters its resistance to an electrical circuit as light fluctuates on it. He exhibited, also, that varying heat in light rays, falling on such a substance as lamp black, caused alternate expulsions and absorptions of gas. Professor Bell stepped into the dim limelight, which haloes the heads of those in the world of Science, with his "Singing Arc". It was Ruhmer who first applied these discoveries to the cinema, although, as Mr. Herring might say, that sentence has nothing to do with the rest of the article.

The beginner will be grateful to Mr. Cameron for giving the schoolroom laws of sound, a most forthright section which follows the history. The difference between longitudinal waves and transverse waves (well, you'd be surprised); telegraphy and telephony; the common vacuum tubes; light sensitive cells, as the photoelectric cell, by means of which common print can be read to the blind, the

## CLOSE UP

actinic electric cell, and the photovoltaic cell; are all docketed neatly. Elementary laws of acoustics are sketched in; for example: one can learn, or remind oneself, that walls closer than 50 feet can give no echo, and that  $l=v/n$ . I admit that Mr. Cameron has the honour of being the first to explain television to me so that I could begin to cultivate a bored attitude of superiority towards it after reading his words once only.

A lot of space is devoted to studio technique. At the Fox joint the inner walls are made of 4-inch solid gypsum blocks, 1 inch of hair felt, 3 inches of air space, and another layer of 4-inch gypsum blocks. The outer walls are made of brick and masonry and are about 24 inches in thickness. A double ceiling, concrete plaster separated by a 3 inch air space and 1 inch of hair felt, is supported from roof trusses. Floors are covered with soft carpets, inner walls are draped with Celotex, and heavy Monk Cloth is hung perpendicularly to the walls and ceiling so that it can be raised or lowered to meet the degree of resonance required. The air is changed every 8 minutes. Boy, they don't do these little things by half measures, in other words they look after their barrels of tar and hope that the pounds . . . . . but that sentence *ought* to have nothing to do with the rest of the article.

The monitor is the important new technician in the sound studio.

He looks down on the set, through three thicknesses of glass, and controls the sounds from a switchboard; he can tone down a violin and tone up a drummer when both are playing in the same orchestra.



## CLOSE UP

There are special microphones for the women.

Mr. Cameron passes on to the incandescent lights, commenting on the best makes. All that the reader can extract from this admirable analysis makes the book worth its weight in fan magazines. The problems that faced the engineers were ignored by the producers; the fact that light reflectors will reflect sound, and the 6-inch piano convex condensing lenses, used in front of the bulbs to eliminate "ghosts", were not thought of over an afternoon tea.

The cameras had to be brought into line without the necessity of scrapping the existing equipment. The steel gears had to be changed for gears of formica. The drumming noises in the magazines were cut out by holes in the metal case which interrupted the sound waves. An endless fabric belt removed the danger of "Clicking".

Rival methods of reproducing and recording sound are sifted: the R.C.A. projector, the Vitaphone, the Movietone, the Cinephone, the Phonofilm, the Simotone, the Bristolphone. Some of this was a little too heavy, and I skipped, yet without feeling cheated of any of my money. (I borrowed my copy from a kind colleague!) I picked up from the mass of information the surety that the ear needs a lot of discipline to catch up with the eye; and this in spite of the fact that the eye does not detect contrasts under 2 per cent., and the photoelectric cell recognises variations of 0.1 per cent. Therefore, technically, the stock for recording sound has to be free from the blemishes of the stock used for light recording. "In telephonic terms everything at a level one TU below full moderation will be free from distortion, and the peaks will be substantially perfect."

## CLOSE UP

Still, the ear of the spectator is not ready for the nuances that the eye will welcome. Sensibly Mr. Cameron does not waste time with these psychological problems, but gets on with his job.

Operators will swear by his book, and at a system of entertainment which demands that they shall regulate tonal volume of sound reproduction by the number of patrons in the theatre. The lay mind is struck by the way a sound film must be rehearsed, if the best results are to be obtained, by each operator, much as a play must be rehearsed at each theatre.

Sound tracks on the film are synchronized and the band can be treated like silent positive, but records would drive a saint to the depths of a character in one of Warner Brothers' underworld dramas. Splicing film with sound track is bad enough, for the join can be heard unless it is covered with a triangular patch of black lacquer, whose frequency is below audible range. The screens can no longer be opaque, the microphones are adjusted behind the screens, so that the sound will reach all parts of the house, and the fabric must be porous. Screens in use to-day, with loose threads forming a fine fuzz, are unsatisfactory because of their poor power of initial reflection, and because the interstices collect dust, rendering the fabric unfit for use in six months.

I hope that I have given some idea of the vast amount of data in Mr. Cameron's work, which ranges from remarks on film speed indicators to the information that the central portion of the positive crater of an arc is the only steady fragment of the illumination.



## CLOSE UP

*The Patriot.* By Alfred Newman, translated by Cyrus Brooks. Peter Davies. 3/6.

For those who like a record of a film in book form as well as for those who enjoy historical novels, this book will be an excellent addition to the library shelves. The story is too familiar to need repetition here, but the volume, uniform with Carl and Anna, is convenient to handle and eminently readable. These editions of Peter Davies, Ltd., suggest an excellent means of permanent reference which might prove of value in the history of films. We would welcome a further series devoted to great films which are not necessarily based upon already existing fiction.

*The Romance of the Talkies.* By Garry Allighan. (Claude Stacey, Fleet Street, London).

This is more likely to prove popular than the opus of Mr. Cameron; for one thing it only costs a shilling, and, for another, it contains anecdotes about penguins which squawk and a chapter of chat on the stars.

It is odd to see the evolution of talkies explained as the desire of the showman for novelty, no credit being given to the growth of an art form. It is, also, strange to find Mr. Allighan discussing British converted sound studios.

What a lot of fighting there is going to be amongst the inventors. This book mentions names which Mr. Cameron ignores, those, for example, of Czermac and Blake. And then the whole matter of speakies was brought to a head by a relative of Professor Bell losing her larynx and the determination of Mr. Warner to combat the vaudeville invasion of the cinemas. Mr. Allighan says so.

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There is some new ground. Amateurs are given a section, and sound on steel is explained. (A ribbon of steel wire is magnified in fields of different intensity.)

It has been worked out that, in a "cheapie", words cost two shillings each, and in *Show Boat* about five pounds each. Other scraps of useful information, which, in a note, the author acknowledges that he principally culled from the *Kinematograph Weekly*, the *Bioscope* and other authoritative journals, merit reproduction here.

Every technician, on the floor, wears a permanent telephone set, which enables him to communicate from one silent booth to the other, simply by plugging in his telephone to the nearest terminal. Clive Brook says that you can't float about in speakies, as the rate of turning is twenty-four to the second. The director must control his artistes by means of signs, he must place himself in the position of the conductor of an orchestra. Art directors must think of sets in terms of perfect tunnels. It is impossible for cast or director to do creative work on the sound stage, all must rehearse on a silent stage. As the higher frequencies are the ones which give "brilliance" to music, heavily padded studios sound "dead". The soil on which a studio is to be built should be considered, clay should be replaced by a mat of sand. The demands of newspaper men are forcing the perfection of television. The Bell Laboratories have a department whose function is to make a study of the human throat and ear, as these are the organs used in telephony; therefore they have a staff of fifteen of the most famous ear and throat specialists in America. Sound acoustics can



## CLOSE UP

be improved in an auditorium by using heavily upholstered seats.

That is a little peptonised, Mr. Allighan. It is well worth paying a shilling to get more of it. The "dirt" about *Gang War* is worth the price of the whole book. "A Maine exhibitor had to eliminate the word 'Damn' in his *Sunday* showings, because the word was on the film."

OSWELL BLAKESTON.

## WHAT A RED HELL.

The British film industry once had ideas. It thought it could make films. We have just had *The Plaything*, based on a play, *Life's Pretty Much the Same*. It might be said, after viewing it, that our films are still pretty much the same.

An now *To What Red Hell*, perhaps the most perfectly named picture there has ever been. It started at midnight recently before an enthusiastic audience, and ended up at nearly two thirty before a house as limp as the leading players. Described as the greatest talking picture ever made, it was directed by a gentleman named Edwin Greenwood, who showed no reason why he should ever make another picture.

Its story concerns an epileptic youth who murders a prostitute during a seizure, watches another man be sentenced to death for the crime, only to confess and commit

## CLOSE UP

suicide in time to save the wrongly-accused boy friend. It could have been made into a fair picture, but for the delightful way in which the director made all the players go through their stuff in the best Elephant and Castle manner, flinging their hands about and shaking their heads as though they were playing to a couple of love-birds at the back of the gallery.

But, it has sound technique. Nearly all the long shots are silent picture material, and the "100 per cent. dramatic dialogue" consists of close-up cuttings. The delicious way in which a noisy jazz band is synchronised with the inevitable long-shots, only to be completely cut out from talking close-ups of people supposed to be sitting on top of the dancers, is too funny to miss. Mr. Greenwood assured the Press, incidentally, that his was perhaps the only film for which the music had been specially written in, line for line, scene for scene. We can only hope they never let it occur again.

To repeat the dialogue would be asking for trouble. It has to be heard to be believed. At the end of the picture—as we thought—the madman's father is acquainted of the fact that his son has just stolen his pistol and has taken it into the garden. "You hear that, James?" he repeats to his brother, "he has a revolver." Maybe it was not James. No one really cared.

Nearly 12,000 feet, and the greatest talking picture ever.

HUGH CASTLE.



## CLOSE UP

### PHASES OF CINEMA UNITY.

If Mr. Potamkin flatters me by quotation in his third article on the above subject, why doesn't he do the thing properly and complete the quotation? In saying that a fly, with sound apparatus attached would be less of a fly and more of a nuisance, no doubt I implied that the silent film can be "nuisance enough." Of course it can. I have seen hundreds of silent films that were an intolerable nuisance, either from lacking what they needed or from having what was needless. To my illustration of the fly I added: "The fact is, a fly knows its own business and keeps its movements quiet, and in its own way it is the most perfect thing that ever existed." Film or fly should contain neither more nor less than its function demands.

Mr. Potamkin says that by attacking the "stupid uses of the sound film to date and the unjustifiable suppression of the silent film," I am condemning the compound film. What I am really condemning is the stupid and the unjustifiable. But Mr. Potamkin and I are really out for the same things, and I therefore grant him absolution.

ERNEST BETTS.

### HOLLYWOOD NOTES.

An overhead railway for the transporting of stage sets has been completed at the Lasky-Paramount studios. It has a total length of two miles. By its use large sections

P  
CLOSE UP

of sets are easily and quickly carried from the carpenter shop to the various stages. Heretofore this work has required large corps of men and huge trucks.

\* \* \*

Al Jolson's current vitaphone film, *Say it with Songs*, is to be followed by *Mammy*, a singing picture which is now in production at Warner Brothers' studio. Both the story and the music are by Irving Berlin, the popular American song writer.

\* \* \*

Universal Company have recently announced the winners in their \$2000 prize contest for the best letters in answer to the question, "Why do alluring women love homely men?" This is illustrative of the methods employed by Universal in furtherance of their policy to maintain as close a personal relationship as possible with their film patrons. Each week their national advertisement, in the form of a personal letter from the president, Carl Laemmle, invites comments and suggestions from the public, while at intervals during the year cash prizes are offered for picture titles or for answers to questions such as the one above quoted.

\* \* \*

*Romance of the Rio Grande*, a Fox movietone, has been especially adapted for Warner Baxter from Katherine Gerould's novel, "Conquistador." Baxter's charming portrayal of the gracious Mexican bandit in Fox's first outdoor talking picture, *In Old Arizona*, brought a widespread demand for his further appearance in that type of picture. The locale of the *Romance of the Rio Grande* is in northern Mexico, and the exterior scenes are being taken on the spots



## CLOSE UP

actually called for in the story. A cattle round-up is one of the spectacular features of the picture—a ranch containing forty-five thousand head of cattle having been leased for this purpose by the Fox company. Al Santell is directing the production.

\* \* \*

The English celebration of Primrose Day, April 19th, in commemoration of the day of Disraeli's death, has been recorded on a special Vitaphone reel and will be shown in connection with George Arliss' film version of *Disraeli*, recently completed at Warner Brothers' studio.

\* \* \*

Greta Garbo's forthcoming M-G-M picture is from a story written especially for her by her present director, Jacques Feyder. Like her current production, *The Single Standard*, it will be a silent film. Her first talkie, *Anna Christie*, will follow next.

\* \* \*

Animated cartoons have now been taught to speak and sing. By using what is known as the Cherniavsky system, developed at the Universal studio, the artist of these animated drawings is able to match them perfectly with sound effects.

\* \* \*

Paramount-Lasky sound experts have perfected an "explosion-proof" microphone, which is being used for the first time in George Bancroft's new picture, *The Mighty*. Normal microphones and sound tubes are shattered by the explosive vibrations produced by gun fire.

\* \* \*

## CLOSE UP

An Arabian orchestra of five natives, imported directly from Morocco, will be seen and heard in the forthcoming M-G-M screen version of Major Zenovi Peckoff's novel of the Foreign Legion, *The Bugle Calls*, directed by George Hill.

\* \* \*

*The Jade Box*, the first talking-picture serial, is in production at Universal. It will consist of ten weekly episodes, of two reels each.

\* \* \*

*Golden Dawn*, the Hammerstein operetta, is being prepared for the screen by Warner Brothers. A section of the Los Angeles river and its environs will serve as the African locale of the libretto. Alice Gentle and Walter Wolf have the leading rôles, supported by several other equally well known operatic singers. A chorus of two hundred negroes will constitute a unique and impressive feature of the film.

\* \* \*

The Fox Company's recently announced policy of discontinuing the making of silent films has been amended. The inability of thousands of exhibitors throughout the country to secure sound equipment for their theatres has induced the company to resume the making of silent versions of their movietone productions. And this they will continue to do until at least seventy-five per cent. of the theatres are equipped to show audible films. At present not more than twenty-five per cent., or a little over five thousand, are thus equipped.

\* \* \*

At the present writing the title of Norma Talmadge's forthcoming first talkie is *New York Nights*. It was



## CLOSE UP

originally *Tin Pan Alley*. Not the least of Hollywood's problems is the selecting of picture titles. Experience has taught the film producer that Shakespeare's airy opinion of the value of a name has no place in the picture show business.

\* \* \*

Not to be outdone by the Warner Brothers in their all-star *Show of Shows*, Paramount Lasky are preparing a like stellar production, headed by Elsie Janis. The title and the theme of the picture have not yet been announced. So far the studio managers have contented themselves with the impressive announcement that the production will not only include every star and feature player under the Lasky banner, but will also call for the co-operation of all the directors, all of the writers and all of the technical experts of the organization.

\* \* \*

*La Marseillaise* is the title of a "super-production" under way at the Universal studio. The story deals with the life of Rouget de Lille, the composer of the French national anthem, and the circumstances surrounding the birth of the song. The music for the picture has been written by Charles Wakefield Cadman, one of America's foremost composers. Paul Fejos is directing the picture.

\* \* \*

The actors' strike, ordered by the Actors' Equity Association has been called off. Disaffection among the ranks of the association itself and the uncompromising stand on the part of the producers are responsible for the defeat of this attempt to unionize the picture industry. While the

## CLOSE UP

strike caused some inconvenience to the producers, it at no time seriously interfered with the casting of their pictures or the maintainance of their production schedules.

\* \* \*

United Artists studios announce that D. W. Griffith is planning to film a life of Abraham Lincoln. Griffith himself, in commenting upon the project, says, "I regard the opportunity of bringing the story of the real Lincoln to the talking screen as a sacred trust, and if I am in any way successful in doing justice to the character of the greatest man in American history, I shall have accomplished the greatest ambition of my life."

\* \* \*

*Tiger Rose*, a forthcoming Warner Brothers' picture, contains a novelty in the form of a completely dark scene—the interior of an unlighted room. No camera was used. The scene was "shot" wholly with microphones and consists only of the voices of two men talking in an unseen adjoining room.

C. H.

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A new creative group has been formed in New York, called Excentric Films, which devotes itself solely to the experimental in Film Art and plans to release its films through the little film art theatres in America and in Europe.

The initial production now under way, is a two reel satire,



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*What's Wrong Now?* (tentative title), from a story by Lajos N. Egri, Hungarian playwright whose expressionistic drama, *Rapid Transit* was produced in New York by the Provincetown Players. The film has been adapted for the screen by Herman G. Weinberg who is also assisting in the capacity of assistant director and who was heretofore connected with various little "art" theatres in New York, The Fifth Avenue Playhouse, The Carnegie Playhouse, etc.

Direction and sets are by Robert van Rosen (formerly scene designer for Maurice Schwartz's Yiddish Theatre, the Provincetown Playhouse and others). The settings will be in the expressionistic vein, there are to be no titles and several new photographic (or rather, cinematographic) innovations are promised.

The story is a satire on feminine idolatry in America and judicial methods there and will be projected through the medium of grotesque fantasy and stylized acting—much of the "slip action" hearkening back to Freud's notebooks, since it is of course, impossible, because of stringent moral censorship in New York, to achieve complete "realism" where the story's exigencies demand it.

A set of "stills" will be forwarded CLOSE-UP for exclusive release on the Continent as soon as they are available.

Simultaneously, another film, a one-reel study of New York, styled, *Cosmopolis*, by Herman G. Weinberg is also being made and will be released at the same time. Stills from this film will also be sent to CLOSE-UP.

Excentric Films marks the first *avant-garde* production unit in America.

## CLOSE UP

### LUCKY STAR.

A NEW BORZAGE GAYNOR-FARREL SLAPSTICK.

Perhaps the funniest film of the year. Charles does not point the waif's wee nose to the stars, but washes her "inside and out". But you have to hear the Gaynor say it to get the chuckle. Photography rotten. You know those studio exteriors, country lanes and such. When anybody moves a million half shadows, spread like a starfish, follow the movement shamelessly, but don't suggest a million suns shine on these quiet countrysides. Ophthalmic goitre would do as much if you wanted to see things that way.

### THE CRIMSON CIRCLE.

British Internationalizing Edgar Wallace.

Musical Effects by Edmund Meisel.

Somebody once spoke of noises "Meiseling" themselves into the subconscious. We lauded this happy discovery in happier memory of *Potemkin*, *Berlin*, *Hoppla*, *Ten Days*. The man, then, who had given us "effects" for the world's best films was now to give them for the worst. Or, be kind, and say near-worst.

The programme told us a lot about a method that cannot have existed, and if it had, would have given only one kind



## CLOSE UP

of effect—one of permanent yawning. The programme told us, for instance, that every character had a distinctive motif, was also given a musical rendering by means of appropriate instrumentation. (This blah rang no new bell. Shige Sudzuki had once told us much more clarid ideas concerning character instrumentation on a small railway platform near the German Staaken studios). Example of appropriate instrumentation: man talking angrily (boombedeboom)—woman speaking anxiously (peckpeckpeck). Wurlitzers had done it for Felix.

“The music for each scene composed to convey its atmosphere; each picture on the screen has sound in rhythm—expressing the ‘soul’ of every situation.”

The soul of every Edgar Wallace situation!

It was not as bad as that. We should remember how Mara comes into a room and sits down to read a letter, all to the tune of a highly rhythmised tango. That was worth a lot when you consider Mara—which Meisel helps you to do—in this light. He Meisels her into your subconscious. Nothing else could. Remember too the typewriter’s cute tappetytap, and specially a harpsichordish *con brio* tinkling round the somberer noises of a business interview.

Why do we put a man like Meisel on to a man like (with respects due) Edgar Wallace? Left to ourselves we would certainly accompany *Potemkin* with Moonbeams in a Chinese Temple Garden. Still, there it is. Tremolo luv motif and all. With fugitive, sly moments of the Meisel we know and care about.

## FOUR FEATHERS.

Tense, sporting mothers brought their bowler-hatted offspring. Remembah, this is England's glory. Cooper and Schoedsack in a flurry of splenetic National Anthematizing. The animals were nice. Their animals could not be otherwise. But the rest was not really very funny, though the bowler hats rose like brodericks on bayonets in a military three cheers. It was preceded by the world's wittiest film. A synchronised cartoon entitled *When the Cat's Away*. We'll say no more as Mr. Herring has promised to write on it next month. But, in the meantime, see it if you can.

---

It is interesting, in spite of the bowler hats of Young England, to take a look at the recently published Educational Survey, from the Secretariat of the League of Nations. This contains the interesting result of an enquiry conducted by Mrs. C. N. Wilson into the child's reaction to war films. This enquiry was set in the form of a *questionnaire*, which asked :—

1. What War films have you seen?
2. Write down the name of one of these films.
  - (a) How long ago did you see it?
  - (b) What do you remember best?
  - (c) What do you think of our side?
  - (d) What do you think of the other side?
  - (e) What did the film make you think of war?



## CLOSE UP

This *questionnaire* was submitted to 4,022 children from 76 schools in Bradford, and to 4,000 children from schools in Kent, Lincolnshire and Oxford, and in every case teachers were asked to do nothing to prejudice the replies one way or the other.

The replies revealed an overwhelming anti-war majority. 95 per cent. of all the cases examined were anti-war. The remaining 5 per cent. were in varying degrees pro-war. From these established facts it is evident enough that war films such as we have seen give to the child mind an impression of distaste and horror.

---

We thank Herrn Wolfgang Ertel-Breithaupt and Herrn Hans Walter Kesselmaier, editors of *Filmkünstler und Filmkunst*, for sending us some copies of their interesting German magazine. (Verlag: Berlin W 30, Rosenheimerstrasse 13). It calls itself a contribution to the history of contemporary films and talkies. We like the fresh and courageous criticism of this paper which does not shrink from honest judgment. Criticism of film production in general, of films, of certain societies and individuals.

There is an article about film-morality that holds the attention. Question of Censorship again, but this time stated from another point of view looked at as the shadow of film morality: there is a lack of responsible men in the broader circles of film industry, speculation instead of creation, business instead of art.

## CLOSE UP

It is a good sign, that the recognition of the bad quality of the average film becomes more and more popular; that an increasing number of people rebel against it. And I hope, too, that there will be a day when a huge majority of good and moral films will make censorship an entirely superfluous institution—instead of its being a hindrance to the few good films that exist to-day.

A good "cultural review" of the talkies endeavours to explain the exceedingly involved state of the matter and to keep us up to date with regard to the latest German and international productions.

Not only film-art but also film-artists are in the scope of this nicely illustrated magazine and we find a lot of photos, drawings, and articles on the leading actors, directors, critics and cameramen.

So that everyone who likes the cinema will find many rewarding features in this monthly review.

TRUDE WEISS.

---

Mary Fields, director of non-fiction subjects for British Instructional Films, is completing *Deferred Payment*, a drama, for The British Social Hygiene Association. The story is of a purser who, on becoming engaged to a girl, reads a leaflet which sends him to a herbalist. He spends a lot of money, and thinks he is cured. At first all is well, but, after the baby, the girl develops his disease, and the second baby is blind. The film has been made with all the technique and polish of an ordinary production, and Miss



## CLOSE UP

Fields believes that it is unique among British or American propaganda films in that there is no villain, and that the 'message' is not defeated by over emphasis. The 'other side' is not made a martyr of, and the foolish young man is a very charming personality.

The difficulty in making English propaganda films is (a) small allocation of money—the Government allows about a third per reel of the amount allowed in Germany, and (b) the refusal of most public and private societies to allow an interesting story, or a subtle means of approach.

The *Secrets of Nature* Films, for which Miss Fields is responsible, are to be synchronised. It will be possible to listen to the bean as it runs, and the process will be explained by voice instead of by sub-titles.

R. d'E. B.

---

The World League for Sexual Reform arranged a showing of the early Russian film *Abortion*. It is difficult to comment on it from a cinematographic point of view. It was not, as was announced, the Russian version but a censored German copy, so scratched that it was sometimes difficult to distinguish the images. The projector and the film broke constantly. It would have seemed worth while to hire a portable projector for the evening.

To the intelligent individual it is difficult to understand why the film should not have been shown to family audiences at the Polytechnic. It had much in common with the Little Victorian moral stories nurses used to read to children on

## CLOSE UP

Sunday afternoons, broken by somewhat alarming diagrams in what seemed to be a quite irrational manner.

It was convincing proof however that science and entertainment value have nothing in common, and as compared with *Mechanics of the Brain* or *Bed and Sofa*, this film must be regarded as a failure, at least in the form in which it was presented the other night. We are also becoming convinced that the specialized presentation of such films to small audiences serves little purpose. They were made for the young and the workers and where neither are represented in the audience there is only the impression that a great deal of fuss has been made about a point which intelligent people accept without question. A purely scientific film which offered fresh data of medical value would be valuable and of great interest; to show a censored story and a few diagrams merely builds mystery round a straightforward situation.

## AN AMATEUR FILM OF DISTINCTION.

*The Gaiety of Nations*, stills of which are included in this issue, is a remarkably good essay in creative imagination produced by two members of the London A.C.A., Mr. J. H. Ahern and Mr. G. H. Sewell. The entire film, 350 feet in length, was made, with the exception of one or two shots, in a room 15 feet by 11 feet, and models were mainly employed.

The life of a city—any city—in Europe is suggested—



## CLOSE UP

cafes, streets, skyscrapers, newsboys, electric signs, traffic. A politician is assassinated, war is declared, the people are whipped up into a fever of patriotism, panic breaks out on the Stock Exchange. Then, the scenes of war—battlefields—tanks going into action—explosions—men dying in agony, followed by graveyards—the financial chaos—the triumph of the American dollar.

The models used (mostly cardboard) were simple but extraordinarily effective, as also were the close-ups and silhouettes of human beings in a number of scenes. Realistic shots of battlefield explosions were achieved by the use of tin reflectors.

For the success of a film of this character nearly everything depends on the lighting and the cutting, and both are excellent. Yet the producers worked throughout with only two "Kodalites" ! The cutting based on the Russian method, was very good. Some shots were reduced to a matter of frames.

Produced on 16 mm. stock, *Gaiety of Nations* sets a standard which every amateur should study closely. Some amateurs seem to aim at imitating the large scale productions of the professional studios. Such methods are almost bound to result in failure, for obvious reasons. The function of amateur cinematography should be to create, and not to imitate, to bring something new to the Cinema, and not to copy old methods. Messrs. Ahern and Sewell have shewn what can be done, and how it can be done, and the example they have set should result in nothing but good for the amateur film movement in Britain.

A. W.

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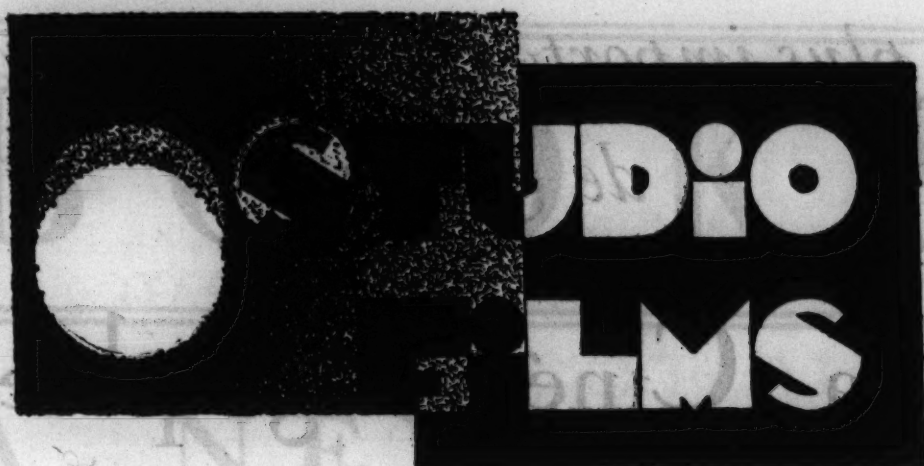
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